



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

**Reference: Certain aspects of the administration of the Australian Electoral Commission**

MONDAY, 13 AUGUST 2007

CANBERRA

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON**

**ELECTORAL MATTERS**

**Monday, 13 August 2007**

**Members:** Mrs Mirabella (*Chair*), Senator Sterle (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Adams, Carr, Fierravanti-Wells and Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Danby, Mr Forrest and Mr Griffin

**Members in attendance:** Senators Fierravanti-Wells and Sterle and Mr Danby and Mrs Mirabella

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

- 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;
  - 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.

**WITNESSES**

**CAMPBELL, Mr Ian, Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission ..... 1**

**PICKERING, Mr Tim, First Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Operations, Australian  
Electoral Commission ..... 1**

**URBANSKI, Ms Gail, Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Information Strategies,  
Australian Electoral Commission ..... 1**



**Committee met at 9.41 am****CAMPBELL, Mr Ian, Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission****PICKERING, Mr Tim, First Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Operations, Australian Electoral Commission****URBANSKI, Ms Gail, Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Information Strategies, Australian Electoral Commission**

**CHAIR (Mrs Mirabella)**—I declare open this hearing, the third public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into certain aspects of the administration of the Australian Electoral Commission. The inquiry was referred by the Special Minister of State, the Hon. Gary Nairn, on 28 March 2007. On 21 May 2007, the minister asked the committee to include in its inquiry additional terms of reference to consider whether the National Tally Room should be retained beyond the 2007 federal election. The inquiry has received 16 submissions to date and copies are available on the committee's website.

Before we proceed any further, is it the wish of the committee that the supplementary submissions 13 (a) from Free TV Australia and 11(a) from the Community and Public Sector Union be accepted as evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

I welcome representatives from the Australian Electoral Commission to today's hearing and I apologise for the delay in commencing the hearing. I remind witnesses that although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and warrants the same respect as proceedings of the respective houses. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The evidence given here today will be recorded by Hansard and will attract parliamentary privilege. We have received two written submissions to this inquiry from you. They are quite substantial submissions. Would you like to make any additional comments or make an opening statement to the committee?

**Mr Campbell**—Not really. You will recall that I made an opening statement at the previous hearing that addressed both terms of reference. Just for ease of summary, I think I made two major points with regard to the National Tally Room. One is that, in our view, the National Tally Room has now become, in effect, a large media centre and there is still a misconception amongst some people, particularly in the public, that they are actually seeing the votes being counted, and of course they are not being counted at the National Tally Room. What actually goes up on the board at the Tally Room are some minutes behind what is on the computer—indeed, some many minutes. That was the major thrust of my statement at the last hearing, and I think I will leave it there

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Deputy Chair, do you have any questions?

**Senator STERLE**—Yes. If the National Tally Room is abolished after 2007, have you given any thought to how you would disseminate information for those who do not have computers?

**Mr Campbell**—There would be no change to what happens now. What happens now is that the media centre is one place where most of the media come—not all, but most of the media. So there are television broadcasting units, the outside broadcasting; there is radio and there is print. They are not using what goes up on the tally board at the end of the hall. What they are using is what we are feeding through our Virtual Tally Room, through the net. In effect, they would use all of that. They would just set up their broadcast units in a different place.

**Senator STERLE**—So you will still have television coverage?

**Mr Campbell**—Most certainly. The question is whether or not the TV broadcast units would be in a big hall out at the Exhibition Centre or whether they would be in their own studios at Chatswood, Gore Hill or wherever.

**Senator STERLE**—How many attendees at the National Tally Room are party officials?

**Mr Pickering**—The number varies from election to election and we do not keep stats on the number of party officials who are there. The political parties have headquarters in places other than out at the Tally Room; however, if they require it, we give them space for party officials to attend, but we have not monitored them in specific numbers.

**Mr Campbell**—I think from memory, out of the three major parties, one of them had a very senior representation in 2004 and the other two probably did not.

**Senator STERLE**—Do you know whether many attendees candidates?

**Mr Campbell**—The only candidates you would get would be those from the local area. In the same sense, the only House of Representatives members that you would get there would be potentially the two sitting members for Canberra and Fraser. Of course, senators do come. The media network do get senators there.

**CHAIR**—I guess they have far more time on their hands.

**Mr Campbell**—I will leave that to your side of the table!

**Senator STERLE**—In your submission you refer to stakeholder research you conducted earlier this year on the relevance of the Tally Room. Who were the 29 key stakeholders you identified and who were the 10 who replied to your request for feedback?

**Mr Campbell**—Ms Urbanski can read them out if you wish.

**Senator STERLE**—Yes, please.

**Ms Urbanski**—The people we went to were the Special Minister of State, and he provided a response; the shadow special minister, no response; the chair of JSCEM, no response, the national secretary of the ALP, no response; the federal director of the Liberal Party, no response; the federal director of the Nationals, no response; television—ABC, a response; and the CEO of the Nine Network, a response.



**Mr DANBY**—Didn't he come in?

**Senator STERLE**—Yes, he did.

**Mr Campbell**—Channel Nine were represented at your Sydney hearing.

**Ms Urbanski**—From the SBS, there was no response; the Ten Network, no response; the Seven Network, no response; and Sky Channel, no response. From Free TV Australia we had a response, and you also had a submission. In the area of radio we went to Austereo Group: no response. From Southern Cross Broadcasting, we had a response; the Macquarie Radio Network, no response; the Australian Radio Network, a response. The group news director—sorry, that is part of the same group.

In newspapers, we went to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and we had a response; the *Daily Telegraph*, no response; the *Herald Sun*, no response; the *Australian*, yes, we had a response; the *Canberra Times*, we had a response; the *Australian Financial Review*, no response; the *Courier-Mail*, no response; the *Age*, no response; the *West Australian*, no response; and the *Mercury*, no response. Other media groups we went to were AAP, with no response; National Press Club, no response; and federal parliamentary press gallery, no response.

**Mr DANBY**—Was that directed to the chairman, Ms Karen Middleton?

**Ms Urbanski**—Yes.

**Senator STERLE**—In terms of the turnout to the National Tally Room—

**Mr DANBY**—Didn't you ask her who did respond, or do we have those?

**Senator STERLE**—We have those. It might be easier if you table them.

**Mr Campbell**—We can give it to you. Would you like us, in that, to summarise in one word whether they supported or did not support their intention?

**Senator STERLE**—Yes, please.

**Mr Campbell**—Because, of those who responded, there were probably more who said no or did not mind than said yes—but a bit marginal.

**Senator STERLE**—That would be helpful, thank you. Could you tell us if the public visitors to the National Tally Room are predominantly older people, younger people, families, locals?

**Mr Pickering**—I am not giving you a very clear answer here, but there was a general spread from young children right through to elderly people at the 2004 election. From my observation it tended to be more of a family situation, so middle aged. However, as I said, there were numbers of people whom I would describe as retired people rather than elderly, and those families also had children with them.

**Senator STERLE**—Has the demand to get in increased or decreased over the years?

**Mr Pickering**—It tended to increase from 2001 to 2004. We did not keep accurate statistics on the number of the public coming in in 2001. We had security guards monitoring the access by the public into the National Tally Room, and they gave us a figure on their understanding of numbers through the door. In 2004, again, we had security issues associated with the numbers of the public who were able to access the National Tally Room, and they were limited to 300 people in the National Tally Room at any one time. They were able to stay in the public viewing area for a period of time and then a fresh number of the public were allowed through.

**Senator STERLE**—How many people does the public viewing area hold?

**Mr Pickering**—It held approximately 300 people.

**Senator STERLE**—So at any time there could be approximately 300 waiting to get inside?

**Mr Pickering**—That is correct.

**Senator STERLE**—And the National Tally Room takes 300 inside.

**Mr Campbell**—This year we have increased marginally the amount of area that we are going to have for the public to come through at the expense of the area we were giving to the TV networks.

**Senator STERLE**—Okay.

**Mr Campbell**—Could I make one other observation in response to your question. We have no evidence and no indication that the public that are visiting the tally room are people from interstate. There may well be interstate visitors if it coincides with something else in Canberra at that time, like Floriade, but we have no evidence to show that there are a substantial number of interstate visitors. Our feeling is that they are mainly Canberra residents.

**Senator STERLE**—Thank you.

**Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS**—We heard evidence in Sydney from the ABC and Channel 10 about the prospective closure of the national tally room. Have there been any approaches informally made to the AEC about some sort of cost sharing in relation to that?

**Mr Campbell**—Not that I am aware of.

**Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS**—Is that something that the commission would give consideration to if there was some approach made by media networks to assist in the continuation of the national tally room in some manner?

**Mr Campbell**—Yes. In our submission in paragraph 7.3 we raised a number of potential options for the future. The second one we raised the question about whether the media should be asked to contribute to the cost of providing the centre. As our submission says, it is costing us probably in excess of \$1 million because we have direct and indirect costs. To my mind, that is an issue that needs to be at least on the table and considered.

**Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS**—Will you be actively doing that? I guess at this point in time your approach has been to the media outlets in relation to commenting on the closure of the tally room. It has not been directed towards some sort of alternative option.

**Mr Campbell**—I think a bit will depend on what the committee actually recommends and what government decides to do with the recommendations. I read the comments from the media agencies that have come in and the transcript of their evidence to you in Sydney in July. Interestingly, in a TV interview on Radio National, Channel 9 with Garry Linnell and Antony Green from the ABC—they are only two individuals and I do not think Mr Green was professing to speak for the ABC—I thought both of them were making it quite clear in their own way that the TV networks did actually get quite a benefit out of having the hub and the people going through. As Mr Green said, it is a bit hard to ask the Electoral Commission to pay half a million dollars or a million dollars just to conduct a tally room which is very much just a backdrop for television networks. I think the question of cost is very important.

**Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS**—Yes, it is, and how much. Given the amount that is at stake and given the potential distribution, if I can put it that way, we are talking about quite a number of networks who would pick up on the election and potentially that is a cost that can, through a large number of organisations, perhaps be quite dissipated.

**Mr Campbell**—There is another advantage to them which I do not think has come out in the earlier evidence to you or in the media interviews they have had, and that is, by us providing the tally room, we are the ones that actually have to make sure we have the facility location on polling night. We only know six or seven weeks before the actual polling night. So while they do have to have to get outside broadcast vans down and people down, they do not have to worry about booking facilities for a multiple number of nights. That is all our responsibility.

**Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS**—Yes.

**Mr Campbell**—That is an advantage that they have that I do not think they have acknowledged publicly.

**Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS**—Were you to go down this route, have you thought about ways that you could recover costs—if I can put it that way?

**Mr Campbell**—We would probably send them an invoice. Part of the difficulty there would be that some would probably pay because, for some of the bigger agencies, it is probably still worth their while, but for some of the smaller ones, my guess is that, if they had a small charge—and this is a personal view—they might suddenly find that they could do everything that they were doing from the press gallery here or from their offices in a capital city.

**Mr DANBY**—What would be the total savings if the tally room was got rid of?

**Mr Campbell**—We have both direct and indirect costs. Our direct costs in 2004 were about \$800,000. What our costs would be this time is not yet finalised because we are still going through a couple of tender processes that have to be finalised. Plus, there is several hundred thousand dollars in what we call indirect costs because we have a lot of our information

technology people there for many days beforehand setting everything up, setting the computers up, making sure the wiring is right, so—

**CHAIR**—Are they people who are already on the books?

**Mr Campbell**—They are on the books, so there is an opportunity cost there. They are our people.

**CHAIR**—So the indirect costs you are referring to are opportunity costs?

**Mr Campbell**—It is what I would call an opportunity cost, yes. They could be doing other things and we have to set priorities. In a sense, savings would probably be close to about \$800,000 in direct costs.

**Mr DANBY**—I want to be absolutely clear on this: are you waiting for the committee's recommendations and the government's decision as to whether you are going to do one this time, or have you already booked and you are going ahead?

**Mr Campbell**—No, this one is proceeding. We are well advanced in arrangements for it. We had a meeting with media in Sydney two or three weeks ago. No, this one is proceeding and it will be in the same location as most recent ones.

**Mr DANBY**—If it were recommended that it be let go, where would you see the bulk of the money being applied? Is it a cost saving that would go into the general revenue of the AEC or would it be applied to anything in particular?

**Mr Campbell**—I think that would be something that in the end would fall into the negotiations between me and the department of finance on our election budget for 2010.

**Mr DANBY**—Are there further improvements that could be made to the virtual tally room for which extra money would be helpful, or are you doing practically everything there that needs to be done?

**Mr Pickering**—The virtually tally room has come along in leaps and bounds over recent years. The virtually tally room that will be presented on election night in 2007 will be the best and most comprehensive of any that we have had in the past. To answer your question, the issue of development of presentations like the virtual tally room never stop. There are always better ways of presenting things, in a more graphical format rather than just with plain statistics, and those sorts of enhancements will continue into the future. But the number of screens and the number of reports that will be available in the virtual tally room will be the most comprehensive this time. This is part of the argument that we put in the submission: the detail in previous elections, in relation to what you were able to get from the virtual tally room compared to the range of details that you could get at the National Tally Room if you were getting a media feed to one of the TV channels, was different. But now the virtual tally room has all the functionality that was previously available only at the tally room. That is why there seems to be less of a need for that feed in the tally room. It is because of the widespread availability of the VTR now.

**Mr DANBY**—Is the improvement in the virtual tally room a function of technology or a function of more funds and more attention?

**Mr Pickering**—Both.

**Mr DANBY**—If we were to abolish the National Tally Room and only have this virtual tally room, what would we do for people who did not have the internet?

**Mr Pickering**—The media will still get the feeds, as Mr Campbell said earlier. The TV channels will still be doing their presentations on the results based on the data feeds that the AEC will be supplying to them.

**Mr DANBY**—So people will be getting the virtual tally room on their free-to-air television?

**Mr Pickering**—They will be getting TV's presentation of those statistics. The virtual tally room is one form of presentation. The ABC and Channel 9, for example, do their presentations in a different way. They have got different software—presenting the results in a much more graphical format, for example—and they will continue to develop their software along with the AEC developing the VTR software.

**Mr Campbell**—If the National Tally Room were not here in 2010—assuming the next election is in 2010—the only difference the average voter would really notice—when they are watching whichever television station is doing it: Channel 9, the ABC, Channel 7 or whatever—is that they would not have people walking backwards and forwards. But it depends on where the stations do it. They might do it in a shopfront. The one thing they would notice is that they would not have the big tally board behind. There would be no other difference. They would be getting what they get now. As Mr Pickering says, the media do not use what goes up on the board. They use what we are giving them as an electronic feed, and they would continue to get that.

**Mr DANBY**—What is your feeling about the difference between the presentation of the TV stations and the virtual tally room? Why don't they use your graphics directly? Is their stuff that much better? Are you going to overtake them at some point or come into competition?

**Mr Campbell**—The commission does not predict the outcome during the night. What we do is we count the votes, we publish them and we do 'two candidate preferred'. We show a swing compared to the previous election on a matched booth basis. That is what we do. What the TV networks do, quite rightly, is this. They then take that and start to say what the result is going to be that night for a government or for an opposition—who is going to be in government. I do not believe that it is the AEC's role to do that predictive element. I think that is the role of the parties and of the media. So what they are doing, what they add to our thing, is to actually start saying—they do their great graphics, showing the House with the various colours and people sitting; they are using all that we are doing and then they are actually predicting—who is actually going to form government.

**Senator STERLE**—So there are 800,000 reasons why you think VTR can do it better?

**Mr Campbell**—What I am saying is if the National Tally Room were there what we would provide would be no different; what they would do would be no different.

**Senator STERLE**—Sorry, the 800,000 are the dollars.

**Ms Urbanski**—If I could add, some of the media actually do use the virtual tally room. Others prefer to have a direct raw data media feed to do their own graphics. So there is a mixture in the usage.

**Mr Campbell**—But we are not competing with them, Mr Danby, in answer to your question.

**Mr DANBY**—You explained that. You cannot be as predictive as them, otherwise you might end up in the situation that certain people did in the American election when at one point certain candidates thought they had won and certain candidates didn't and then it swung back the other way.

**CHAIR**—I was quite interested in your list of advantages as to retaining the National Tally Room, one of them being a brief paragraph: 'A symbol of Australian electoral democracy.' It is a somewhat intangible benefit or advantage as to retaining the National Tally Room. Do you give that particular argument for retaining the National Tally Room any weight? You do obviously by listing it in the submission, but what sort of weight do you give it?

**Mr Campbell**—That is a pretty hard question. All of we people in the commission are fully aware of how the votes are assembled, counted and transmitted through. There is no counting whatsoever that occurs out in the buildings. There is not a ballot paper within kilometres of the National Tally Room. There are no scrutineers. There are none of our poll officials. That said, a couple of the media agencies—print media more than TV, I have to say; a couple of the print media responses—made the point that they felt it was an important element as to the transparency of Australia's democracy. That is their view. Frankly, when I go travelling around visiting my offices et cetera and I ask people outside Canberra—because these people who are responding still have a strong Canberra focus—I think it was probably less of a point seen outside Canberra. My own personal view is that it does not show anything about the transparency of Australia's democracy.

**CHAIR**—You do not think that should the government decide after the next election to do away with the National Tally Room for the 2010 election there would be some sort of concern out there? Often you really do not get a reaction from the general public who are not specialists in a particular area such as matters of counting votes in the National Tally Room but there could be a sense of something being taken away from them and a sense of a reduction in transparency.

**Mr Campbell**—If and until that happens we will not know, but I will make two observations: one is that when we were seeking views about whether or not to continue with the tally room for this year, there was a bit of a flurry on the first day it came out on local ABC Radio. A lot of people thought that we had made the decision not to have it, whereas that was not what we were doing. There were a couple of hours on the media and that was the end of it.

The other thing that I think should be borne in mind here is what happens at the state electoral commission level. Some of those have tally rooms and some do not. I think that of those that do

continue with the tally rooms there is only one that is open to the public. So they are just for the media and they are quite clearly seen to be for the media. The party leaders attend at some of them but at some they do not. To my mind, at the state level, there has been a substantial watering down of tally rooms at state elections and I have seen no adverse reaction.

**CHAIR**—One of the other points you mentioned in your submission is, as you describe them, ‘near fail-safe figures’. Could you please elaborate on that?

**Mr Pickering**—I will describe the way the tally room has operated over the decades. It used to be the last point of an accumulation of election results figures, as we have outlined in the submission. Given that the computerisation has developed a long way further than the requirement for manual transmission of figures, the way in which the AEC has developed the systems is to back up the computerised side of things as distinct from the manual ones. So it has really been there as an absolute drop-dead fallback and that is why we are saying that it is a near fail-safe backup—because if all of the computerisation fails there is still a way of doing a manual display of results. That was the description in the submission.

I want to go on and say that the computerisation of today allows us to use a lot more backup facilities inside the particular technology that we are using. For example, with respect to the virtual tally room on results night—after polling day—the backup servers that we have located around Australia in case of a failure of one piece of equipment are enormous. Similarly, with our election management system on computers located at the AEC headquarters, we have backup fail-over systems built into all of that technology as well. Those things were not in place when the tally board was reigning supreme. For now, the computerisation has so much more redundancy built into it than in previous times that a manual fallback situation, as we say in the submission, has never been required.

**Mr Campbell**—If I can add to that, we also have to operate on the basis that we might have a fire alarm, for example. We might have to actually evacuate the National Tally Room. We have a fall back position if we do not have the tally room there.

**CHAIR**—When was that developed?

**Mr Campbell**—We have had it for a number of elections.

**Mr Pickering**—Yes, we have a backup facility in that if we are required to evacuate the National Tally Room location we can continue to provide the electronic data feeds to the virtual tally room and to the TV stations, so they would continue as though nothing had happened. The National Tally Room out at Exhibition Park would be evacuated and closed down. So the results would still continue to be supplied to the public.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps I should know the answer to this one, but what is the total budget that the AEC has to conduct an election? Or is it easy to break it down from the annual budget?

**Mr Campbell**—Without going to the last dollar, most of our election money comes in the election year; although, we do get several million additional dollars in the preceding year. This year is an exceptional year in terms of dollars because not only do we have our election budget but also we have money that the government gave to us as a result of joint standing committee

reports after the 2004 election, particularly with the proof of identity and the earlier close of rolls. So we are anticipating this year that the total expenditure on election matters—excluding the funding that we provide to parties afterwards in terms of votes—just in running the election will be mid 90 million.

**CHAIR**—Sorry?

**Mr Campbell**—Mid 90 million—\$94 million, \$95 million, \$96 million.

**CHAIR**—So the direct costs of \$800,000 are not that significant when you look at the overall budget?

**Mr Campbell**—No, they are less than one per cent.

**Mr DANBY**—Mr Campbell, I cannot resist the opportunity with all of you here to ask you about an answer I received from Mr Nairn between the last time we saw you and now, based on evidence that you provided to him. The most important piece of evidence was the number of people who had previously used the five-day period of grace to enrol at the last three elections. Can you recount what that was approximately?

**Mr Campbell**—It was seven days actually.

**Mr DANBY**—Seven days, okay.

**Mr Campbell**—In the 2004 election, 420,000 enrolment cards were received in the seven days before the close of rolls. 78,000 were new enrollees. About 78,000 to 80,000—you are calling on my memory here—

**Mr DANBY**—You are very good at it, which is why I am doing it.

**Mr Campbell**—78,000 to 80,000 were people re-enrolling. There were 38,000 who had no change. In other words, they gave us an enrolment form but they were actually correctly enrolled. The remainder were people who were changing their address details—some of which were intradivisional, some of which were intrastate but interdivisional and some which were interstate. I cannot give you the break-up of those last few categories.

**Mr DANBY**—That is very valuable. Could you give me the figures for 2001 and 1998? I just want the global figures. I am not talking about the breakdown which you gave for 2004, but—

**CHAIR**—Are these figures already available on the public record?

**Mr Campbell**—Yes, they are, and they have been in submissions we have made to this committee. I cannot recall them off the top of my head.

**CHAIR**—I think it is best, from the point of view of accuracy, that if you are going to ask any questions with regard to previous submissions it would be fair and more accurate to use your own time or your staff's time to access those publicly available submissions.



**Mr DANBY**—Thank you. I really appreciate your advice, but what I want to do is—

**CHAIR**—I think it is unfair to expect the AEC—

**Mr DANBY**—There is new material provided—

**CHAIR**—Excuse me, Mr Danby.

**Mr DANBY**—by the AEC and I want to drill down to it.

**CHAIR**—You are perfectly entitled to do so, but it is rather unprofessional and quite rude not to have forewarned the witnesses here today of that information requirement. Perhaps a little preparation on your behalf in looking at previous submissions and evidence would have made for smoother and more accurate questioning this morning. Please proceed.

**Mr DANBY**—Thank you for that editorial. Mr Campbell provided some new material to Minister Nairn which is very good and very accurate. That is why I wanted to drill down to that. I was more interested in the global figures. I am sorry if I gave you the impression that I wanted specifics of the breakdown. One of the new figures that I saw was that, as of 31 March this year, 410,000 18-year-olds to 25-year-olds were not enrolled all around Australia. Is that a new figure that people would not have been aware of in any other submission?

**Mr Campbell**—On a number of occasions, including in submissions to this committee and in our annual reports, we have done an estimate of the proportion of age cohorts that are not on the roll. Indeed, I think we have given to this committee not only information on 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds but a year-by-year breakdown—18, 19, 20 and so on. As we have made quite clear, there have been times not only now or earlier this year when the number of 18-year-olds has been as low as 50 per cent on the roll, but of the cohort getting up to 24 the percentage will be higher. It will be in the high 80s or low 90s. When you get up to the over 50s you are probably up into the mid 90s. But, no, I do not believe they are new figures.

**Mr DANBY**—The other figure I saw was that at the 2004 election, as per your previous breakdown, 136,000 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds used that seven-day period—if it is a whole week including a weekend—to enrol. As of 31 March, we have 410,000 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds not enrolled. If you were to extrapolate the figures from last time to this time, would we end up with 136,000 or anywhere near that number? I understand that you have previously had TV advertising campaigns to enrol people. What is your feeling about the number of people that you will mop up? Can you assure us that there will not be more than 100,000 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds not enrolled because they do not have this period?

**Mr Campbell**—Perhaps I need to make a couple of points here. First of all, I think it is a very dangerous to assume that in 2004 and 2001 there were not people who came in after day seven and tried to enrol, because they did. As you point out, it was seven days including Saturday and Sunday, whereas the new law is three working days, so it will exclude the weekend. That is one point. No matter where that line is drawn, there will be people who come in after it and whose vote will therefore not be counted. Point two, we are still working very hard in advising people of the changes to the deadline and of the new rules that apply. If you take young people, we have probably embarked on a seven- or eight-month campaign. I will give you a few examples of

what we have been doing. There was the orientation week, the rock and roll initiatives we did with Triple J at the Big Day Out concert and the advertising we started in May. We did six weeks of advertising and in another two weeks we will start on another burst of advertising. Plus, there is Enrol to Vote Week. We are confident that the participation rate—because what you are really talking about is the participation rate of 18 to 24-year-olds by being on the roll; that is the technical term I would use—for 18 to 24-year-olds whenever the Prime Minister calls the election and the roll is closed, on the best data we have from ABS on the population, will be at least equal to that at close of rolls in 2004. One of the reasons for that is that one of the successful things we have managed to do this year is have a significant number of 17-year-olds provisionally enrol. We have between 20,000 and 30,000 17-year-olds currently on the roll who will turn 18 before 20 October.

**Senator STERLE**—Was that through schools?

**Mr Campbell**—Not only schools. I did not start with the Enrol to Vote Week but rather with orientation week—which is at universities—the rock and roll initiatives, the Big Day Out concerts and various other activities and advertising. The Enrol to Vote Week was actually very interesting because we probably did not get quite as many enrolment cards out of that as we had expected. There were two factors for that. One was because it is hard to get young people in years 11 and 12 together at same time. They are doing work experience and studying for exams et cetera. The other is because some of the anecdotal feedback we had from schools was that a lot of them were already on the roll.

**Senator STERLE**—17-year-olds?

**Mr Campbell**—17-year-olds and 18-year-olds were already on the roll. We are quietly confident that our participation rate will be no less than it was in 2004.

**Mr DANBY**—That is including the 136,000 who missed out?

**Mr Campbell**—You are using the equivalent to that 136,000. Our data tells us at the moment that we are travelling at a similar participation rate as 2004, yes.

**Mr DANBY**—You said before that the 400,000 people now have three days to enrol, but the government's legislation actually means that first-time voters—new enrolees—will actually not have that right as of the day the writs are issued.

**Mr Campbell**—That is right.

**Mr DANBY**—That is a change, isn't it?

**Mr Campbell**—Yes, but both of them are changes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Mr Danby. As a result of those very probing questions, it is very comforting to know, Mr Campbell, that the participation rate will be at least the same as 2004 for those 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds. Perhaps with your extensive and varied publicity campaigns and the funding received for those we will even see a figure in excess of the participation rate in that age group for 2004. I am not going to verbal you or make that suggestion, but just ponder

what could be. Thank you very much for your attendance here today. You will receive a copy of the transcript of your evidence to which you can make corrections of grammar and fact.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Fierravanti-Wells**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 10.27 am**