



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

**Reference: Conduct of the 2004 federal election and matters related thereto**

WEDNESDAY, 27 APRIL 2005

LONGREACH

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON**

**ELECTORAL MATTERS**

**Wednesday, 27 April 2005**

**Members:** Mr Anthony Smith (*Chair*), Mr Danby (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Brandis, Carr, Forshaw, Mason, Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Melham and Ms Panopoulos

**Members in attendance:** Senators Brandis, Mason, Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Danby and Mr Anthony Smith

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Conduct of the 2004 federal election and matters related thereto

**WITNESSES**

**BECKER, Mr Vaughn Alwyn, Chief Executive Officer, Ilfracombe Shire Council..... 19**  
**COLVIN, Ms Shelley Joy, Private capacity..... 24**  
**DOYLE, Mrs Sonja Lorraine, Private capacity..... 1**  
**HOOGLAND, Mr Bob, Chief Executive Officer, Winton Shire Council ..... 12**



**Committee met at 4.13 p.m.****DOYLE, Mrs Sonja Lorraine, Private capacity**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into the conduct of the 2004 federal election. Since 1984, successive Commonwealth governments have referred similar inquiries to this committee's predecessors after each federal election, with a view to improving the operation of Australia's electoral system. These committees have a long and successful history of recommending improvements to Australia's electoral processes and have played a central role in developing the electoral system we now enjoy. The current inquiry into the 2004 election was referred by the Special Minister of State on 2 December 2004. To date, the inquiry has received over 135 submissions, demonstrating the community's keen interest in the electoral system. Copies of these submissions will be available from the committee's web site early next week.

This afternoon and tomorrow we will be hearing from a diverse range of organisations and private citizens who have an interest in the electoral system, the integrity of the electoral roll, postal voting and other matters. These include representatives from shire councils, the Australian Electoral Commission, private citizens and local members of parliament. Following this afternoon's hearing the committee will travel to Ingham on Thursday to gather further evidence from individuals and organisations.

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 House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard and will attract parliamentary privilege. At the conclusion of the formal part of our program, I will invite people from the floor to come forward and make any statements they wish in relation to electoral issues that affected people in this area. When called to make a statement, I ask that you simply identify yourself and speak for no more than five minutes.

I welcome Mrs Sonja Doyle. The committee has received your submission. It has been numbered submission 46 and was authorised for publication this morning. Are there any corrections, amendments or additions you would like to make to your submission?

**Mrs Doyle**—There was one that I noticed, but I think I noticed it before it was printed for your booklet—that was when I sent the email to Dr Sarah Miskin I had that our mail deliveries were Monday and Friday but they are actually Monday and Wednesday.

**CHAIR**—So you are drawing our attention to the fourth line under the heading 'Background' on the fourth page.

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Before I ask you to make a brief opening statement to summarise some of your points of view before we have some questions, I particularly want to thank you for appearing here today. I can tell from your submission that you have travelled a long distance and that you have put a lot of effort into your submission itself. We thank you and your husband for

driving down here to this public hearing. Yours is the sort of evidence that we want to hear from members of the public so that we can take that back to the federal parliament and put it into our report, which will be out later this year. I invite you to make a brief opening statement.

**Mrs Doyle**—Thank you. I have given you some background in my submission, but briefly we live on a property 85 kilometres south of Blackall and our access to Blackall is mostly via a black soil road which becomes impassable when it is wet. Our mail service comes twice a week. When it rains we may not get a mail delivery for some time. My husband and I do not normally have a postal vote, so we are not normally on the permanent postal voting register, mainly because we have often worked on the polling booths in Blackall. This year we hoped it would rain and it looked like it might rain, so we applied for a postal vote.

The two applications for the postal votes were sent off in the one envelope. My husband received his postal ballot but I did not receive mine. I waited for the next mails to come and then I rang the AEC. They told me that the postal ballot could be posted right up until the Friday before the election. That was not good enough for me because it would have meant that I would not get it, I would not get it back and I would be effectively disenfranchised. I contacted Bruce Scott's office in Dalby and asked the Dalby AEC to issue me with ballot papers as there was a very limited number of mails before the election. I reapplied by fax to Dalby AEC and subsequently the ballot papers from the Dalby AEC arrived in the next mail on Monday. So I was one of the lucky ones; I got my postal ballot. But there were many others who did not. I know of a number in the Blackall area where people who were on the permanent postal voting register in a family and one would miss out. A friend of mine and her husband do not normally apply for postal ballots either. Her husband's arrived but hers did not. We were wondering whether or not they had something against women, but that is just an aside—I am only quipping.

I have a few suggested solutions. One of them is to do with pre-poll voting. In Queensland we can pre-poll vote in the couple of weeks before an election. Once the ballots are printed and everything is in order, you can vote at the court house in Blackall. My husband and I often take this option. We register a pre-poll vote so that our vote is there, just in case it does rain and we cannot get into Blackall to vote. I feel it is long overdue that we can do this federally, not just in certain designated areas. Remember that Maranoa is huge. I know that you can do it a couple of weeks before in Dalby, Emerald, Warwick and probably other places too, but there are not very many. I feel it would be an easy solution if everywhere there were court houses there was a pre-poll option for people. I truly do not believe you would have the numbers of people applying for a postal ballot if the option to pre-poll were there. Also, some people are travelling too. Pre-poll voting is long overdue.

The other thing to mention is absentee voting. Federally it is a shambles. You should be able to do it anywhere in the country, but you cannot: you can only absentee vote in your own state. Otherwise, you have got to have a postal ballot. If you are working on the polling booth in Blackall, you get a lot of people from interstate pulling up to vote—they are travellers—but you have to tell them you are very sorry but it is no good going in because they will only find that they cannot vote absentee. They might be travelling urgently on family business or whatever. It is really important that something be done, and I cannot see why it cannot be. In this day and age of IT, given all the information technology that there is now, why can't there be absentee voting everywhere in every booth in Australia for a federal election?



I also think—and these are just suggestions—that, while we are in this age of computer technology and it is compulsory to vote in Australia, while it is compulsory to vote it needs to be as easy as possible for people to do it. I feel that it is the duty of the AEC to investigate the introduction of an electronic system of voting with a digital password that can be used once by a voter and once only—and if they stuff it up, it is stuffed up but they have done it. I cannot see why that cannot be done. We all have to have digital passwords for our bank accounts. If the banks can do it, there must be some sort of program that can be written so that Australians can vote electronically. The ATO has an electronic system for lodging tax returns and also payments. I think that if the ATO can do it the AEC needs to be able to do it too. I think every Australian elector, whether they live in an urban or a remote area, deserves to be able to exercise easily and with a minimum of stress their democratic right to vote—and this was not so for postal voters in Maranoa in the last federal election.

Further to the ATO, I went online last night just to see whether that was right, because I do not use the online part for returning my business activity statements. What I said is very true. The ATO had a special offer: if you are a quarterly activity statement lodger, which I am, you may be eligible for a two-week deferral of your activity statement due date for quarters 1, 3 and 4 if you lodge and pay online—and terms and conditions apply, of course—so it is possible. The ATO has also been sending out things with the business activity statements saying, ‘Lodge online this quarter. Join thousands of Australian businesses and save time this February by lodging your activity statement online through the business portal.’ There is another one as well about the business portal.

So it can be done and I think it is high time that an electronic system of voting was looked into. It would mean that we would not have to go through this chaos of applying for a postal vote—that is one thing with the electronic voting system. I cannot say that I would expect it to be up and running immediately, but probably by the next election. For the immediate term, for the next election, please look into pre-poll voting in every courthouse across Australia.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that opening statement. We will now proceed to questions.

**Mr DANBY**—Thank you, Mrs Doyle. I understand from your testimony that you are not opposed to compulsory voting. You said that while we have that system we have to see that the postal voting system, the pre-polling system, works as effectively as possible—is that your view?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes, it is. While ever we have compulsory voting the system must work as effectively as possible. If we had voluntary voting, I still think it should work as efficiently and effectively as possibly because, after all, it is everyone’s democratic right to vote.

**Mr DANBY**—But you are not here advocating voluntary voting.

**Mrs Doyle**—No. I am here about being able to vote.

**Mr DANBY**—There were two gentlemen in Dalby from the Electoral Commission who explained to us that of the 11,000 postal votes in Maranoa there were some 6,000 general postal votes. Yours was an application for a general postal vote, wasn’t it?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes. It was not to go on the permanent register—

**Mr DANBY**—Sorry, it was to go on the permanent register?

**Mrs Doyle**—No, it was not.

**Mr DANBY**—Just a regular postal vote application.

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes.

**Mr DANBY**—There seems to be something of a trend in this electorate, probably because of remoteness, for permanent postal voters. Six thousand of the 11,000 are GPVs—that is, people who make an application for a permanent postal vote. But you were not one of them.

**Mrs Doyle**—I was not one of them this time, but I have considered it. I know that this has been the trend in our district in the past. People used to just go into Blackall to vote, but for some reason or other—weather usually—they got caught out and could not vote and so they applied to go onto the permanent postal register.

**Mr DANBY**—Did you have some weather report that there was going to be rain at that particular time. You said you worked on polling booths, you seem to be pretty experienced, but there was going to be something that would prevent you voting that time?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes. We thought that the weather looked like it might change; we had hoped. When you are on the land you do follow the weather very closely and the forecasts at that time were favourable.

**Mr DANBY**—Thank you.

**Senator MASON**—Mrs Doyle, I join with the Chairman in thanking you very much for being with us this afternoon. It is very good for you to come a long way. Referring to your submission, if I can, and your experience with the Australian Electoral Commission in trying to procure your postal ballots, you say in your submission that you applied for postal ballots and they were sent off in one envelope. Your husband's ballot papers arrived and yours did not on Wednesday the 22nd. You waited for two more mail deliveries and then you contacted the AEC call centre—it was your first contact with the AEC—to be told to wait for the next mail. Then you contacted Mr Scott's office.

**Mrs Doyle**—That is right.

**Senator MASON**—Then you rang the Dalby AEC and asked them to issue you with ballot papers. Then you reapplied by fax.

**Mrs Doyle**—That is correct.

**Senator MASON**—That was the process by which you—

**Mrs Doyle**—That was the process.

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**Senator MASON**—Were you happy with the service you received from the Australian Electoral Commission?

**Mrs Doyle**—With the Dalby office, most definitely. I did not feel that the people at the call centre knew what the urgency was or how remote I was, but I do not know where they were actually situated—I did not ask; it is my fault for not asking. In my first contact with the AEC, I really did feel that they did not realise that my mail services were limited and I was in danger of not receiving my ballot until after the very last mail when I would not have been able to vote.

**Senator MASON**—But after you made contact with the Maranoa Electoral Commission office your problem was addressed fairly rapidly?

**Mrs Doyle**—Very rapidly. They were well aware of how the mail systems worked in our remote areas, and they obviously got a ballot paper in the mail to me immediately, because I received it very promptly.

**Senator MASON**—Thank you. Another issue is that people who live in urban areas often do not realise that in rural areas technology is vital for business. I have just been looking at the submission by Mrs Lindsay MacDonald from Coolatai, near Blackall, and she makes similar points to those you have made this afternoon, Mrs Doyle—about email being a more reliable way to return written material. She suggests all forms should be available for downloading from the internet and she concludes:

In view of vastly improved telecommunications services, inclement weather and poor mail services should no longer be the reasons why people are unable to vote.

Do you agree with that?

**Mrs Doyle**—I certainly do. I agree with that entirely. I do think we should make use of the communications that we have and the technology that is available to us. As I said before, I cannot see why, in this day and age, we cannot have an electronic system of voting with a digital password.

**Senator MASON**—Do most people on stations in this district have access to the internet and so forth? Is that common?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes, most do. We in the remote areas were offered a very good deal by Telstra a couple of years ago which most of us took up and so we have a two-way broadband satellite connection. That is for remote subscribers, not the ones that are closer in that used to be in the ‘magic circle’, as we used to call it in the old days. An offer has been made to them now as well, and they have all been taking it up. So most people would have access to broadband internet services.

**Senator MURRAY**—Mrs Doyle, you and I both understand distances; I have come from Western Australia. Western Australians have the same problems with remoteness and voting as you have outlined and I am very sympathetic to your proposals. You talked about pre-polling at the courthouse, and you are south of Blackall: where is the courthouse?

**Mrs Doyle**—At Blackall itself. I know that is also limiting for small towns that, for instance, do not have a courthouse. But they might have a government agency, as we have here in Queensland. I do not know how it works in Western Australia, Senator Murray, but we have a lot of services lumped together with one government agent in Blackall. For example, the department of transport and the lands department are there, as well as anything to do with voting. Mostly our voting is at the courthouse, and the person who used to be the clerk of the court is called the government agent these days. When we go in to claim a pre-poll vote, he or his deputy are the ones who cross our names off the roll and give us our ballot papers et cetera. But pre-poll voting in Queensland, I would think, would not be available in any towns other than those with a government agent or a courthouse.

**Senator MURRAY**—When you said it should be available in every courthouse in Australia, I presume you meant every rural courthouse?

**Mrs Doyle**—Every rural courthouse, yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—You have described your internet access, which is broadband. I am particularly interested in electronic voting for rural voters. Of course, there are rural voters without internet access. A number of ideas have been suggested, such as the ability to vote electronically from remote schools, for instance, because they often have a connection even if the community does not. Let us assume you did not have broadband access, as you do. Do you have a remote school near you which is nearer than, say, Blackall?

**Mrs Doyle**—No, we do not. But that certainly is an option for people in very remote areas. Perhaps in Western Australia that might be more of an option, although you get cut off by the weather in lots of parts of Western Australia, too, particularly in the north-west.

**Senator MURRAY**—Yes, that is quite right, particularly at certain times of the year.

**Mrs Doyle**—In my submission, another of my suggestions was that, for pre-poll voting for those eligible for a postal vote—the remote people—when the AEC sets up polling booths for Aboriginal communities, why can't the remote people vote at those?

**Senator MURRAY**—I want to ask you to rank your preferences for us. We describe voting in person on election day as an ordinary vote. If you as a voter—and you are an active democrat, if I can put it that way; you like the process of democracy and participating—

**CHAIR**—He means you are an active proponent of democracy!

**Senator MURRAY**—I meant 'democrat' with a small 'd'.

**CHAIR**—You always have to be on your guard.

**Senator MURRAY**—I do not want to verbal you. If you had to write down in front of you the four methods we have discussed here—ordinary vote, pre-poll vote, postal vote and electronic vote—and rank those from one to four, with one being your most preferred and four being your least preferred, how would you rank those?

**Mrs Doyle**—I would have to say that first and foremost is voting in person. I think that is the very best way, if possible. I do not think anything can overcome that. You vote, you put it in the box and you know you have done it; it does not have to go in the post or be transferred electronically. You know that it is done. So first and foremost is voting in person.

**Senator MURRAY**—I am sure you are aware that, even if at present you receive a postal ballot, you can ignore that and go off and vote in person. I do not think that having the other options excludes choosing to do that on the day. You now have three options left which enable you to deal with remoteness or weather problems or anything else. If you were ranking those three—pre-poll, postal and electronic—how would you rank them in preference?

**Mrs Doyle**—I would rank pre-poll next, then electronic and I would rank postal voting last. It is really double handling. You have to apply for a form and then fill it in and post it off.

**Senator MURRAY**—So there is a danger of things going wrong. Judging from what you said earlier, you like pre-poll most out of those three because you like going there and the act of voting.

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—I do too. Thank you.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I would also like to thank you very much for your submission, which, although brief, is very helpful—at least to me. I want to pick up two points about it. You use the example of state elections, where there is a capacity for pre-poll voting at every courthouse. Do you know who superintends that? Is it the courthouse officials or are there officers from the Electoral Commission of Queensland sent to pre-polling places as well?

**Mrs Doyle**—In Blackall, as I said, it is the clerk of the court, and he is usually the returning officer for the election. He would have been appointed at the time that the writs were issued and the ballots printed et cetera.

**Senator BRANDIS**—We have not heard from the AEC yet in any thorough way. Perhaps I am doing them an injustice, but I apprehend that what they are going to say is, ‘For administrative reasons we need to superintend the pre-polling and that is why it is only conducted in a small number of localities.’ But of course so much of our Commonwealth electoral process, in particular on polling day, is conducted by volunteers or people engaged as casual employees for the day. So there would not seem to be any issue about the security of ballot papers or any other overwhelming administrative reason why the state system could not apply at the Commonwealth level.

**CHAIR**—Especially when you consider the volumes.

**Mrs Doyle**—Absolutely none, because the same people in Blackall who do the state elections oversee the federal elections.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Have there ever been any problems of that nature in state elections?

**Mrs Doyle**—No.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Is there any issue about the hours or is it done in the ordinary office hours of the clerk of the court?

**Mrs Doyle**—Just the office hours of the clerk of the court.

**Mr CIOBO**—I guess the major point to take away from your submission is that, if it had not been for the fact that you had been proactive in pursuing the issue, the last you would have known was that you contacted the call centre and they said, 'Please wait until you receive it in the next mail or the mail after that.' That would have been it, and you would not have received it. Ultimately, you did not end up receiving two sets of ballot papers, did you? You only received one, once you had contacted the Dalby AEC.

**Mrs Doyle**—Actually I did receive two, but one lot arrived after the election and that would have been the first lot that were posted. As the electoral officer in Dalby told me, of course you are not going to be voting twice anyway, but I would not have been able to vote at all because the second lot of ballot papers did not arrive until the following week.

**Mr CIOBO**—I suppose you have no way of knowing, but do you by any chance have an inkling as to which set of ballot papers came from which application?

**Mrs Doyle**—I know that I received the ballot papers from Dalby because they were postmarked Dalby.

**Mr CIOBO**—Were they the first set that arrived?

**Mrs Doyle**—They were the first set that arrived.

**Mr CIOBO**—How long after election day did you receive your original set of ballot papers—the ones they told you to keep waiting for?

**Mrs Doyle**—They were in the mail the Monday after the election.

**Mr CIOBO**—Had you had your regular mail services in the weeks preceding election day?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes.

**Mr CIOBO**—To go back to the point, if you had simply done what the AEC had told you to do, you would not have been able to vote?

**Mrs Doyle**—No.

**Mr CIOBO**—Just to clarify, you said in your submission that you contacted Bruce Scott's office and then the Dalby AEC. Did you have to lodge a further application to reissue the ballot papers or did you lodge a second application?

**Mrs Doyle**—I had to fill in another application for a postal vote, and I faxed that to the Dalby AEC.

**Mr CIOBO**—I assume they faxed that to you.

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes, it was done by fax. Then I received a letter—this is how I know it came from Dalby too; not only was it postmarked but there was a letter—saying that, if I received two sets of ballot papers, naturally I was only to use one.

**Mr CIOBO**—Were you required to return the second one or to destroy it?

**Mrs Doyle**—Just to destroy it.

**Mr CIOBO**—How would they know?

**Mrs Doyle**—They would not know.

**Mr CIOBO**—When you rang the call centre, did they request your particulars so that they could pull up your file, so to speak, on the system, or was their response: ‘Yes, it’s in the mail’? As the customer calling the AEC, did it appear to you that they were actually making an interrogation into their system to find out how your application was being processed, or was it just a standard response of, ‘Oh yes, it’s in the mail. Please wait’?

**Mrs Doyle**—No, it was not just a standard response, as I recall. They assured me that my ballot had been posted and they suggested that I wait. Well, I did wait for a couple of nights. I did not get the impression that it was just a standard response of ‘It’s being posted.’ I did get the impression that they had looked at it.

**Mr CIOBO**—Was that assurance predicated upon their asking for your particulars—your enrolment address, your name et cetera?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes, they did ask me that.

**Senator BRANDIS**—This question follows on the heels of what Mr Ciobo was asking. When you were speaking to the person at the call centre, did you have a sense that the person had any local knowledge?

**Mrs Doyle**—No.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Did they know where Blackall was?

**Mrs Doyle**—No.

**Senator BRANDIS**—So they had no awareness of the difficulties—for example, the relative scarcity of mail delivery services by comparison with capital cities?

**Mrs Doyle**—No, I do not think so. They did ask me who I was et cetera, and I pointed out to them that my mail services were only twice a week.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Was that news to them?

**Mrs Doyle**—I think it probably was, but I cannot say for sure.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I think one of the issues that we have to address here is this question of the adequacy, particularly for people who live in regional Australia, of having everything processed through a central call centre.

**Mrs Doyle**—Definitely.

**Senator BRANDIS**—You would urge that course on us?

**Mrs Doyle**—I really think you need a call centre in each state.

**Senator BRANDIS**—During your conversation with the person at the call centre, did they suggest that you might also pursue the matter through the local Maranoa returning office?

**Mrs Doyle**—No, they did not.

**Senator BRANDIS**—So they didn't refer you to the local person?

**Mrs Doyle**—No. I decided that I would pursue it when it hadn't arrived after a couple of mails.

**Senator MASON**—You knew your way around the system, Mrs Doyle?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes, I did.

**CHAIR**—And if you hadn't, you would still be waiting.

**Mrs Doyle**—I would still be waiting.

**CHAIR**—You mention that, after everything you had been through, you finally received a set of ballot papers from the Maranoa office with a note inside it—I just want to make sure that I have got this right—saying that if you received a second set to disregard them. Do you still have that note perchance?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes, I do. But it is at home.

**CHAIR**—Would you be happy to furnish that to the committee at a later date?

**Mrs Doyle**—Yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—Given their postal service, it will have to be at a later date!



**CHAIR**—If you could provide that to the committee, that would be of benefit. We sincerely thank you once again for coming here. It is very valuable for us. We wanted to hear first-hand not just from organisations but also from individuals and, had you not put in a submission, it would have been difficult for us to do that. This trip has been made possible by people such as you, who have been prepared to follow up what they saw as a problem—a problem that could affect any voter anywhere throughout the country. That is why we are here. So thank you very much for doing that; it has been of great value and will help us very much in our deliberations. Thank you once again.

[4.50 p.m.]

**HOOGLAND, Mr Bob, Chief Executive Officer, Winton Shire Council**

**CHAIR**—I welcome our next witness. The committee has received your submission, numbered 93, which this morning was authorised for publication. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make?

**Mr Hoogland**—No, thank you.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make a brief opening statement? We have your submission before us, and we can proceed as we did with the last witness.

**Mr Hoogland**—The problems with the postal voting really brought this to a head for us. The mayor and I were in Canberra for a local government conference. We visited the AEC there and were satisfied that the problems that arose from that election had been addressed, but we were not confident that something like that would not happen again and felt that some changes, if they were made, could make things work better. They are the recommendations we have included in our submission. As it turns out, they are identical to the recommendations made by Mrs Doyle in her submission.

The idea of pre-poll voting is very important to us. We confirm what Mrs Doyle said: the staff at the government agents or courthouses are very experienced. They are people who have a significant responsibility in a number of areas, including but not limited to state elections. Very often in Winton one of these staff could actually form a Magistrates Court. They are very experienced people and quite capable of conducting pre-poll and absentee voting.

Absentee voting is an issue for us. A lot of tourists visit here during the tourist season. If the election were held in, say, the middle of July, literally hundreds of tourists would be in Winton, let alone throughout western Queensland. They do not know that they should have voted before they came. They wander into a polling booth expecting that they will be able to cast a vote. There would have been more than a dozen in Winton alone who were disenfranchised because they had an expectation they would be able to cast an absentee vote.

**CHAIR**—And in the history of the town you have had a pretty constant flow, anyway, outside the tourist season, is that right?

**Mr Hoogland**—More than that: in western Queensland we call them ‘grey nomads’—a lot of people who find it awfully cold in the southern states and so they visit the northern states.

**CHAIR**—We know them—they come from Melbourne!

**Mr Hoogland**—A lot of our western towns have very good heritage, are very proud of it and are pleased to present it to tourists. Regardless of that, there are a lot of people on the move at that time, and a lot of them are not aware of pre-poll voting, so they come hoping to cast an absentee vote and find they cannot. It is certainly far too late for them to go somewhere where

they can. The option of electronic voting is one we would love to see explored. Obviously, the security issues need to be addressed, but they are addressed quite successfully in other forms and should not be insurmountable.

I can also confirm that a lot of properties in western Queensland—in our shire anyway—did take up the offer of satellite broadband internet connections and are using those quite successfully. So we believe that is an option that could be used. Our worst-case scenario would have been the one that was identified as an example where someone in our shire was 180 kilometres away from Winton. If they wanted to go on to, say, Longreach, it would have been another 180 kilometres, which is really not an option for them. Thank you.

**Mr DANBY**—Is the pre-poll that takes place during the state election conducted in cooperation with the Electoral Commission of Queensland?

**Mr Hoogland**—I believe they appoint the person to run that, yes.

**Mr DANBY**—Do you know for how many state elections that has been occurring?

**Mr Hoogland**—I do not know, but certainly as long as I can remember. The current clerk of the court at Winton would have been through many, as would his offsider. So, if the clerk were to be run over by a truck, his 2IC would also have that experience. The level of experience with state elections would be quite extensive.

**Mr DANBY**—Without being too intrusive in this, are they paid by the Electoral Commission to do extra duties or do you regard it as part of their duties that they should undertake to be involved in state elections?

**Mr Hoogland**—I do not know. I believe it would be an additional duty. The person in charge would be reimbursed as a Returning Officer, and the various staff underneath would be reimbursed. But I do not know that for sure.

**Mr DANBY**—And they are already employed by the Queensland government? They are not employed by the local council?

**Mr Hoogland**—That is correct. They are employed by the Queensland government.

**Mr DANBY**—How many Indigenous people do you have in the shire?

**Mr Hoogland**—In our shire there are not a whole lot. I estimate that there would be fewer than 100. In Winton they are very integrated with the rest of the community; they are part of the community.

**Mr DANBY**—And their pattern of voting is pretty much the same as everyone else's?

**Mr Hoogland**—In Winton, yes. It would be quite different in a number of other places, but we have a very integrated community in Winton so you would not single them out as being particularly different.

**CHAIR**—In evidence from our last witness we heard that, in the confusion—the kafuffle—with the postal vote issue, she ended up receiving some ballot papers but they came with a note saying, ‘If you should receive a second set, please disregard them’—which she did. Your submission states that during the lead-up to the election, obviously at the height of the confusion, there were AEC spokespeople saying on the radio that if people did not receive their postal votes they should simply pre-poll vote. Is that your recollection? I want to flesh out whether you recall hearing that more than once.

**Mr Hoogland**—The example comes from my mayor; it is not a personal recollection. In my discussions with him, he said it definitely happened that way. And I believe that that suggestion came through more than once. It was repeated on news broadcasts and whatever.

**Senator MASON**—On that topic, it is clear in my mind that in state elections you can pre-poll vote in town—in Winton.

**Mr Hoogland**—Yes, and I usually end up doing so.

**Senator MASON**—Can you pre-poll vote in Winton in federal elections?

**Mr Hoogland**—No, not at the moment.

**Senator MASON**—What is the closest place to Winton at which you can pre-poll vote in federal elections?

**Mr Hoogland**—I believe it is Longreach.

**Senator MASON**—How far is Winton from Longreach?

**Mr Hoogland**—It is 177 kilometres.

**Senator MASON**—Do you know whether the information that people should lodge a pre-poll vote was from the AEC central call centre or from the Dalby branch of the Electoral Commission?

**Mr Hoogland**—I do not know. I just want to clarify the distance from Winton. From Winton town to Longreach town is 180 kilometres, but very often residents of Winton shire are not between Winton and Longreach. They have to travel to Winton before they can go to Longreach. In a worst-case scenario that can be 200 kilometres.

**Senator MASON**—To get to Winton?

**Mr Hoogland**—To get to Winton. Before then they have to travel to Longreach. So the distance for a voter can be a heck of a lot more than 180 kilometres.

**Senator MASON**—Even if you are in Winton township it is a two-hour drive and a two-hour drive back, isn't it?

**Mr Hoogland**—With a 110-kilometre speed limit it is probably just a little bit less; but you are close enough.

**Senator MASON**—My colleague Senator Brandis has just reminded me to ask you this question: are you certain you can pre-poll vote in Longreach?

**Mr Hoogland**—No, but I thought so. My understanding was that it was a possibility. I think I heard Mrs Doyle say it was Emerald and Dalby.

**Senator BRANDIS**—And Warwick.

**Mr Hoogland**—Yes.

**Senator MASON**—We will have to find out. But at best it is Longreach?

**Mr Hoogland**—Yes, at best it is Longreach. Even so, that would not really have been a reasonable option for electors in Winton shire.

**Senator MASON**—You say in your submission that council is aware of the manager of a station in the south-west of the shire who drove 180 kilometres into Winton to vote. So to pre-poll they would have to drive 180 plus 180 which equals 360 kilometres, which is a round trip of 720 kilometres.

**Mr Hoogland**—Yes. And people do make the assumption that they will be able to pre-poll vote in Winton, because that is available at a state level.

**Senator MASON**—Mrs Doyle and Mrs Lindsay MacDonald—in her submission—refer a lot to the use of technology to facilitate the voting in rural areas. What do you think of that?

**Mr Hoogland**—It has potential as a viable option, and obviously there are people who know a lot more about technology than I do. I think the service for properties is quite good, with the two-way satellites that are around. People are very comfortable using technology in general terms. There are some who did not take that up but they would be the minority, so it is important to have options for them. Options for people to get their vote and avoid being disenfranchised are well worth exploring.

**Senator MASON**—My friend Senator Murray is an expert on these sorts of issues. Without going into the issues of security and online voting that Mrs Doyle raised, Senator Brandis raised what I thought was a fairly simple matter when we were having a chat, which was—and Mrs MacDonald makes this point on page 2 of her submission—that all forms should be available for download from the internet. You have got no cost of setting up online voting or anything; you are simply getting forms—for example, applications to lodge a postal vote and so forth.

**Senator BRANDIS**—All forms except ballot papers.

**Senator MASON**—Fair enough. Do you think that would be a good idea—that forms be available on the internet so they can be downloaded then faxed or returned—without going into all the other issues?

**Mr Hoogland**—Yes. I could see the ballot papers would be another one that could be, given that the technology is there to identify—

**Senator MASON**—We do not want to go too far.

**Mr Hoogland**—where people are from. Computers can identify where you are or whatever. It could make that available, as well as making the downloading of forms available.

**Senator MASON**—Downloading forms is not a huge leap forward, but it would facilitate voting.

**Mr Hoogland**—If it is a pre-poll or a postal ballot it does not save that much time. The application form still has to go to someone, turn around and come back. It helps a little bit, but I think it is only a small step in the chain.

**Senator MURRAY**—Does your shire periodically survey the opinions of its citizens?

**Mr Hoogland**—We have a fairly limited approach to that. Our community consultation tends to be by way of advisory committees with community participation, so we do not do a lot of surveying. We do tourism type surveys of visitors to the shire, but limited surveys. Given our entire shire population is 1,600, we probably have pretty good ways of keeping in touch with people's comments and views without surveys.

**Senator MURRAY**—And this community consultation through the committees is it regular and formal, like every few months, or is it irregular, depending on the issue?

**Mr Hoogland**—We have probably more than a dozen different advisory committees and, depending on the issue, some meet very regularly and some meet very irregularly. It varies a bit. Our shire rural lands management committee probably only meets a couple of times a year when issues require it. Our age care reference group, for example, meets virtually monthly, so it does vary.

**Senator MURRAY**—What is in my head is the difficulty of the committee establishing what demand there is. As you know, three of the four things we are discussing here today are all already available in law: the ordinary vote, obviously; the postal vote, obviously; and also the pre-poll vote. The difficulty with pre-poll voting is availability, not the law. Electronic voting is a matter of new law and I would be very interested to find out whether it is appropriate or possible for either the committee to ask a shire such as yours to conduct a postal survey for us and tell us what the cost would be or, alternatively, through your own consultation, to ask the question. I find a person like Mrs Doyle very informative, but I do not know if she is typical. I suspect she is.

**Mr Hoogland**—I suspect she is also. We do stay very strongly in touch with our community. When the two-way satellites became available, they were only available outside the extended zone. At that point in time, we rang people and asked them 'Are you or are you not connecting?' We do make a habit of staying very closely in touch with our community with regard to a variety of issues, particularly the technology issue. The sort of take-up and what people are doing in that line is very important to us. We have our own web sites and so on. We wanted to know what to

do. Do we have a 'you beaut' web site so that people can access it, or is the internet connection so poor that we would actually be annoying them rather than benefiting them by going that way? We do tend to stay pretty closely in touch with our community. We would be happy to do a survey. That would be no problem for us.

**Senator MURRAY**—I cannot speak for my colleagues until we have had a discussion, but I will put this question to you. If the community came back to you and asked whether you would survey your shire with respect to this issue and we suggested some questions, would you be willing to do that for us?

**Mr Hoogland**—Yes. We would be very happy to do that.

**Senator BRANDIS**—If your recollection that Longreach was a place where pre-polling could take place is wrong and Mrs Doyle's and Mrs MacDonald's recollection that it was not available here is right, it seems that the nearest place to Winton where one could have lodged a pre-poll vote was Emerald. How far is Winton from Emerald?

**Mr Hoogland**—It is about 700 kilometres.

**CHAIR**—That is Melbourne to Canberra.

**Mr Hoogland**—I do not know about Melbourne to Canberra.

**CHAIR**—I think Melbourne to Canberra is less.

**Senator BRANDIS**—It is almost as far as Brisbane to Sydney. I think that speaks for itself. To your knowledge, has the Australian Electoral Commission ever made an inquiry to the Winton Shire Council about the services that the AEC provides on election day and whether the Winton Shire Council might have any views to assist the AEC?

**Mr Hoogland**—After the postal voting problems at the election, we wrote to senators and to the Australian Electoral Commission. The AEC contacted us and said they were interested in it, so when we went to Canberra we went and spoke to them about the options. We got a very good reception.

**Senator BRANDIS**—But that was in response to a complaint of yours.

**Mr Hoogland**—Yes.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Prior to the election though or, indeed, prior to other federal elections, had there ever been an AEC-initiated approach to the Winton Council to inquire about what facilities should be provided to the citizens of your shire?

**Mr Hoogland**—In my recollection, no.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Before you were the CEO of the Winton Shire Council, were you the CEO or in the employ of other regional shire councils?

**Mr Hoogland**—I was at approximately the 2IC or deputy CEO level at Mirani Shire Council near Mackay. Before that, I was a fair bit lower down the chain at Mackay city.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Mirani and Mackay are hardly far-flung regions; nevertheless, in your previous experience were you aware of any inquiries by the AEC as to how voting at federal elections could be best facilitated in those shires?

**Mr Hoogland**—At Mirani I imagine I would have been aware if something like that had happened and, no, I am not aware of any inquiries. At Mackay that would not have even come onto my radar at my level.

**CHAIR**—There being no other questions, I thank you once again for your time, your interest and your submission. It is of the utmost benefit to us. That is why we have come out here—to hear things first-hand. I hope you appreciate that we will get a much better view of things, having come here, than we would by just sitting in Canberra and reading the submissions. The submissions are valuable, but it is very valuable indeed to be able to come here and speak one-on-one. As we go about producing our report, we will be in contact. Certainly the secretariat will be in contact with any other queries we have. Thank you very much.

**Proceedings suspended from 5.10 p.m. to 5.27 p.m.**



[5.27 p.m.]

**BECKER, Mr Vaughn Alwyn, Chief Executive Officer, Ilfracombe Shire Council**

**CHAIR**—Welcome to this afternoon’s hearing and thank you for coming. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we move to questions?

**Mr Becker**—I will be fairly brief because I think the two previous speakers have summed things up pretty well. It was interesting to note that somebody wondered whether Mrs Doyle was typical or not. If you are looking at where they live at Blackall, coming up the line to us and then going through here to Winton, you will find that it is a fair cross-section of the community. I have no problem with what either of the speakers say and I would like to support their thoughts that electronic voting should definitely be looked at. There is no reason, in the year 2005, that that type of technology cannot be used. In our shire we have no all-weather roads and no gravel roads so if it happens to rain on the day of polling, or before, nobody will get to town to do any voting in Ilfracombe.

**CHAIR**—Could you perhaps help me with a point of history? Am I correct in thinking that in the 1990 election in the electorate of Kennedy people were able to vote but it took some weeks for the result to come in because there had been floods and rains?

**Mr Becker**—I have certainly heard of those sorts of instances where helicopters, boats and all sorts of things were used to get votes in. I do not think that people in those areas would regard that as anything outside normal. If you live in those areas it is something you expect. I think we have to explore ways to allow people to vote. It is also important to note that voting is compulsory. I believe it should be compulsory but if the lawmakers are going to make it compulsory they should allow us to vote wherever we are in Australia at that particular point.

I also do not think it is very bright to put elections on the days that big national sporting events—like the V8 Supercar race at Bathurst—take place because then thousands of people from all over Australia converge on one place. I do not know what it must have been like for the poor returning officer handling that sort of situation. Maybe the Prime Minister is not going to take any notice of what day I say he should call the poll but I do not think that was a very bright move.

**CHAIR**—In Melbourne we always worry about the AFL grand finals!

**Mr Becker**—I am sure he would not do it on that day. The other thing is that I think there needs to be a tightening up of some of the legislation concerning how votes may be decided after polls. In terms of informal type voting, what returning officers will accept will later be overturned by some magistrate in a court somewhere. I think you have millions of people who have—

**CHAIR**—Too many interpretations.

**Mr Becker**—Yes. Basically, the guide book says we should vote one, two and three and if people cannot do that today I think that is a bit of a problem. They can always get assistance, but to have to accept smiley faces and other sorts of things like this is just crazy.

**CHAIR**—For the benefit of the committee, I have been told you are a returning officer as well.

**Mr Becker**—I have 35 years experience in local government, so, yes, I have carried out a few elections. At Tara I was working in polling booths and things like that a number of times, so I do have some experience.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your opening statement. We will now move to questions.

**Mr DANBY**—Would you say there has been an increase in postal voting in your shire?

**Mr Becker**—I have nothing to support that claim at all. I have not got that information.

**Mr DANBY**—There are 11,000 people in Maranoa who vote by post. It is the highest rate in Australia. Six thousand of them are permanent postal voters, and the others are just the regular ones who apply for a postal vote at election time. It is quite a big issue around this whole electorate. We just found that out this morning when we were in Dalby. Do you think it would be preferable if we decreased the number of people in your shire and in this whole federal electorate who relied on postal votes?

**Mr Becker**—That would be desirable. For postal votes there is that extra step. If we went to some form of electronic voting for those people who did not want to go to a polling booth it would be preferable. I firmly believe that going to the polling booth in person and casting your vote in the traditional method is definitely the way to go. We should then have access to electronic voting, and then pre-polling and postal votes.

**Mr DANBY**—That is the same order as the other witness put down.

**Mr Becker**—We agree on something.

**Mr DANBY**—You made a statement about compulsory voting. If it is necessary, are you against compulsory voting?

**Mr Becker**—Definitely not. It is fundamental to our democracy that we should vote. I have no problem whatsoever with it being compulsory. I certainly do not like the American situation, where in such a huge country such a relatively small amount of people vote in the most powerful man in the world.

**Mr DANBY**—It is actually not compulsory to vote; it is just compulsory to attend the polling booth. What you do with your ballot paper is a personal decision. There is a widespread misunderstanding about that.

**Senator MASON**—In state elections, can you pre-poll with you?

**Mr Becker**—Definitely not. There is no pre-polling in Ilfracombe.

**Senator MASON**—At all?

**Mr Becker**—No. We have no courthouse. The shire council owns the local post office and there is a rural transaction centre there, but there are absolutely no facilities whatsoever. Any activity in that regard would have to be done in Longreach.

**Senator MASON**—Do you think you could be a pre-poll officer in a state or federal election?

**Mr Becker**—I have no problem whatsoever with doing that. I would see it as a service to our ratepayers.

**Senator MASON**—Thank you. In your shire, was there concern expressed about postal vote applications prior to the election on 9 October last year? Did you get the general sense that there were greater difficulties this time?

**Mr Becker**—No, I did not.

**Senator MURRAY**—With respect to electronic voting, introducing that is an extra option in the law. It would also be of interest with respect to state elections and local government elections. Talking about local government elections at present, do people predominantly postal vote there rather than come in to vote?

**Mr Becker**—The Local Government Act allows councils to have full postal voting if they wish. Ilfracombe Shire is one of those shires which conduct a full postal ballot for all its council elections. Within the rural and remote areas that would probably be the case, more so than any other method.

**Senator MURRAY**—So you do not have an ordinary vote with respect to your local government elections?

**Mr Becker**—The Ilfracombe Shire Council does not conduct a polling booth. It is a 100 per cent postal ballot.

**Senator MURRAY**—Can you tell us whether the state government discussed at all the option of electronic voting to accompany postal voting?

**Mr Becker**—I have not seen any discussion on electronic voting.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Did I hear you correctly: there is no polling booth in the Ilfracombe Shire?

**Mr Becker**—There is a pre-polling one.

**Senator BRANDIS**—So how many polling booths are there in the Ilfracombe Shire for the federal election?

**Mr Becker**—One, which is at the state school.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Just one. Roughly how many people voted there?

**Mr Becker**—There are 360 people in the Ilfracombe Shire. There are 180 in the actual town, so it is 50-50. There are roughly 250 people on the council roll.

**Senator BRANDIS**—All right. I want to correct for the record, if I may, some confusion that there was a little earlier in the afternoon as to whether there was pre-polling available in Longreach, because Mr Hoogland thought there might have been and other witnesses said there was not. I have been told by Mr Scott, the member—who I daresay would be in a better position to know than most people—that in fact there was not. That being the case, for people in Ilfracombe who wanted to pre-poll the nearest place where that could have happened was Emerald.

**Mr Becker**—That is right.

**Senator BRANDIS**—How many kilometres away from Ilfracombe is Emerald?

**Mr Becker**—It is four hours.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Four hours. So to do the round trip it is eight hours?

**Mr Becker**—A day.

**Senator BRANDIS**—A whole day. Okay.

**Senator MASON**—That is from the town.

**Mr Becker**—That is from the town.

**Senator BRANDIS**—For people on the outskirts of the shire it would perhaps take longer?

**Mr Becker**—Add on another couple of hundred kilometres—150 kilometres.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Okay. Has the Australian Electoral Commission ever approached your shire and asked for any suggestions you might have as to how the voting procedures for the ratepayers of your shire could be improved or what facilities it could provide to your ratepayers?

**Mr Becker**—For federal elections?

**Senator BRANDIS**—Yes.

**Mr Becker**—I cannot recall ever in my career receiving such a communication.

**Senator BRANDIS**—And your career dates back how long?

**Mr Becker**—35 years.

**CHAIR**—Are there any further questions? There being none, I thank you once again for appearing before us. It has been most useful. I note that you have been here listening to the testimony of the other people, which benefited your recollections. That is why we are here: to hear from people directly. It is good to hear from you, particularly given your experience both in the shire and as a returning officer over a long period of time. Thank you. That concludes evidence from our witnesses. Before we get to our concluding resolution, we have—

**Mr DANBY**—Some testimony from the floor

**CHAIR**—That is right.

**Mr DANBY**—Community statements.

**CHAIR**—We will now have community statements. We have concluded examination of the witnesses who made submissions. We now give the opportunity for people to make community statements from the floor—as we did at Dalby. If there are any people who wish to make a statement, I would ask them to stand up and state their name and the capacity in which they are here and then make a community statement.

[5.40 p.m.]

**COLVIN, Ms Shelley Joy, Private capacity**

**Ms Colvin**—I am from Longreach and I work for the local state member, Vaughan Johnson. We got a lot of calls leading up to the federal election about issues from constituents. I wanted to bring up some of the things that we noted at the time that people were having issues with. In these larger electorates, most people realise that meeting their democratic responsibilities is more difficult than it is for people from Brisbane and so forth. We have distances to traverse et cetera. However, last year we noted that it was not just difficult in some cases; it was nearly impossible. The ability of constituents to register for postal voting is really important, as voting booths are disappearing from our smaller towns. That makes the distances to travel excessive and either impractical or impossible. If the number of booths keeps being reduced in these larger electorates, postal voting registrations will increase, and this has to be taken into consideration for future elections.

In these areas it takes a substantially increased time to receive mail posted from areas outside of the state and even from our capital city of Brisbane. In Longreach, even though we are a central hub of western Queensland, we do not have overnight express packaging. It takes three days to receive a letter from Brisbane, let alone a parcel, which can take anywhere up to five days. That is in Queensland. Some properties have twice-weekly to once-weekly mail runs, which means that if they miss out on the postal vote the day that their mail runs then they can miss out on the postal votes completely. Weather-wise, substantial falls of rain in the outlying areas can cut those properties off for days, which again means that they do not receive their postal votes in time.

From my perspective, I cannot stress highly enough that isolation must be recognised as the biggest factor contributing to the failure of our voting procedures in Australia. There are very few mobile polling booths that travel around aged care facilities. The only ones in Maranoa were in Chinchilla, Dalby, Roma and Warwick, yet we have aged care facilities in Longreach, Emerald, Charleville and Blackall. People who were travelling thought it was possible to do interstate polling anywhere but it was only available in some towns—I think they were Longreach and Dalby but I am not certain which ones.

When postal votes did arrive, the individual's details were on the back of the envelope and there was only one envelope. The full name, address and date of birth were typed on the back of these envelopes. Usually there are two envelopes to preserve anonymity but, when posted, that information was readily available to be seen through the post office. That means there was a security risk for bankcards and so forth, let alone a chance that someone could tamper with or destroy the vote. Some of the postal votes that eventually did arrive had the wrong Senate papers enclosed—for example, those in Charleville. The Cunnamulla region of Queensland received New South Wales Senate how-to-vote cards, which is not very appropriate.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Do you mean ballot papers?

**Ms Colvin**—No, how-to-votes. I think they were Barnaby Joyce's. They were supposed to show how to vote for Barnaby Joyce but they showed how to vote for a New South Wales senator. The ballot papers were correct.

Out here, we appreciate the difficulty in organising something like a federal election and the difficulty of postal voting and so forth, but our postal system, our seasonal road conditions and our extreme distances need to be taken into consideration. These are some very real examples of the dilemmas that our office experienced last year. I would like to congratulate the review committee for taking the time to listen to our concerns. I hope that we can build on and improve our voting procedures greatly. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Shelley. Would you be happy to take any questions if anyone has any?

**Ms Colvin**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone have any? I am not sure they do, but since you took the trouble to come along and make a statement—

**Mr DANBY**—Shelley, could you tell us in a bit more detail about the how-to-vote card of a New South Wales senator being sent to someone in Cunnamulla? Do you know that for a fact?

**Ms Colvin**—Lenore Johnstone, who was helping to distribute Bruce Scott's posters and so forth had a lady call her from between Cunnamulla and Charleville. She said that her personal vote papers arrived and where you tick to vote was correct—it was all right for her electorate and so forth—but where Nationals, Liberals and Labor put their 'how-to vote for us' was wrong. It was a New South Wales senator's 'how-to vote for me' rather than one for a Queensland senator.

**Mr DANBY**—So two separate envelopes arrived at the same time—

**Ms Colvin**—They were in the same envelope.

**Mr DANBY**—So an envelope arrived with a how-to-vote card and a ballot in it?

**Ms Colvin**—I do not know. Maybe it was separate. It was the ballot paper. Sorry, I misunderstood.

**CHAIR**—You are saying that the ballot paper was wrong.

**Ms Colvin**—Yes, sorry, I misunderstood Lenore.

**CHAIR**—We had evidence earlier today in Dalby. I am not sure whether you are referring to this, but a well-publicised problem that everyone has articulated, which has been of great benefit to us, is the frustration with the AEC not getting postal votes out because there had been a processing error—not here in this electorate, but elsewhere in terms of the central processing. That was identified very late in the piece and steps were taken. New ballot papers were sent out to all those people, but we have heard evidence that some people then got a New South Wales

Senate ballot paper as well. I am not sure whether that is what you were referring to, but we had evidence that there were in the order of 100 of those, and that would have been in the days immediately following the election.

**Senator MASON**—Earlier today in Dalby, as the chair mentioned, we heard evidence from some of Mr Scott’s staffers who work in Dalby, and they testified that they were aware that there were particular problems in the October federal election last year with postal vote applications and postal vote ballot papers in Maranoa. You work for Mr Johnson. Did you have the same sense that there were greater problems with the last federal election than there had been previously—that there were particular problems this time with postal vote applications and the distribution of ballot papers?

**Ms Colvin**—Unfortunately, that was my first federal election in Vaughan’s office, so I am sorry, but I would not be able to say.

**CHAIR**—As there are no further questions, I thank you for taking the time to come along and make a public statement today. That concludes all of our business.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Danby**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 5.47 p.m.**