

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

1.1 On 16 August 2007, the Senate referred the provisions of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007 (the bill) to the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration (the committee) for inquiry and report by 4 September 2007.¹

1.2 On 4 September 2007 the Chair of the committee, Senator Mitch Fifield, presented an interim report to the President of the Senate, indicating the committee's intention to table on 7 September 2007. The committee's final report was presented to the President on 7 September 2007.

Purpose of the bill

1.3 The main amendments contained in the bill relate to issues of the:

- Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) authorisation and use of information contained in an electoral roll for the purpose of conducting activities (such as a plebiscite); and
- overriding of State or Territory law that does not allow for a person or body to enter into an agreement with, or assist, the AEC in conducting an activity (such as a plebiscite).²

Conduct of the inquiry

1.4 The committee advertised the inquiry nationally in the *The Australian* on 22 August and 5 September 2007. To help promote awareness of the inquiry, the committee also advertised in Queensland regional newspapers: the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, *Townsville Bulletin*, *Cairns Post*, on 20 August 2007; and the *Brisbane Courier Mail*, *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, *Sunshine Daily Coast*, *Mackay Mercury*, on 21 August 2007.

1.5 The committee received 95 submissions, which are listed in Appendix 1. Submissions were also posted on the Committee's website to facilitate public access.³

1 *Senate Journals*, No. 159, 16 August 2007, p. 4243.

2 Explanatory Memorandum, p. 2.

3 To view the submissions online see: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/fapa_ctte/democratic_plebiscites_07/submissions/sublist.htm (accessed 3 September 2007).

The committee also received several items of additional information and correspondence which are listed in Appendix 2.

1.6 The Committee held hearings in three Queensland locations: Noosa on 30 August 2007; Emerald on 31 August 2007 and Cairns on 3 September 2007. A list of the witnesses who appeared at the hearings is in Appendix 3, and copies of the Hansard transcript are available on the committee's Internet page at: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/fapa_ctte/index.htm.

Acknowledgement

1.7 The committee appreciates the time and work of all those who provided written and oral submissions to the inquiry, particularly in light of the tight time frame. Their work has assisted the committee considerably in its inquiry.

Note on references

1.8 References in this report are to individual submissions as received by the committee, not to a bound volume. References to the committee Hansard are to the proof Hansard: page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.