

27 October 2017

Service Plan

New England By-Election 2017

Foreword

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is committed to delivering trusted, reliable, high quality and high integrity electoral events and services.

The AEC has continued the important change journey started in 2013, delivering a series of improvements to ensure it meets the expectations of the Australian people and the Australian Parliament in delivering safe, trusted electoral events. These have resulted in the delivery of multiple highly successful electoral events, and the AEC will continue to build on this framework through enhancements at future events.

The AEC has also revised processes, policies and procedures following the passage of the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Act 2016* which introduced (amongst other things), changes to the Senate voting system.

A significant body of change is still underway as we continue to build the AEC's reputation as one of the world's truly great electoral administration bodies.

This service plan outlines the key election services and standards that will underpin the AEC's delivery of the by-election in the federal electoral Division of New England. This commitment to service embodies the AEC values, upholding electoral integrity through quality, agility and professionalism. The AEC is committed to continuous evaluation and improvement, and will measure and report on its performance based on the standards in this plan.

Should you have any comments on the service plan or feel the AEC isn't delivering on these commitments, I would ask you to take the time to let us know through our online enquiry form so we can use your feedback to continue improving the delivery of election services.

Tom Rogers

Electoral Commissioner

Overview

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is the independent statutory authority responsible for the conduct of federal by-elections.

A by-election must be held when a House of Representatives seat falls vacant. The vacancy may be for reasons such as the death, resignation, absence without leave, or other ineligibility of the sitting member.

The High Court, sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns (CDR), have made a ruling regarding the ineligibility of Mr Barnaby Joyce to nominate as a candidate in the 2016 federal election. The New England by-election is required as a result of that ineligibility decision.

The timing of a by-election is determined by the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Australian Parliament.

By-election timetable

A number of essential steps are involved in conducting a by-election.

These steps, according to the Australian Constitution and the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act), begin with the issue of the writ (a document commanding an electoral official to hold an election) and end with the return of the writ after the votes have been counted and the results declared.

The New England by-election will be conducted according to the following timetable.

Activity	Date
Issue of the writ	27 October 2017
Close of rolls	8pm Friday 3 November 2017
Close of candidate nominations	12 midday Thursday 9 November 2017
Declaration of candidate nominations	12 midday Friday 10 November 2017
Early voting commences	from Tuesday 14 November 2017
Last day for receipt of postal vote applications	6pm Wednesday 29 November 2017
Election day	Saturday 2 December 2017
Last day for receipt of postal votes	Friday 15 December 2017
Return of the writ (latest date)	on or before Sunday 4 February 2018

AEC service standards

The AEC is committed to upholding four key service standards. The AEC will monitor and report on its performance against each of these standards.

1. Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information

The AEC will support effective participation in the 2017 New England by-election by ensuring information provided to the voting public and candidates is timely, accurate, comprehensive and easy to understand.

The AEC will provide public information, across three phases, to:

- provide eligible electors with a final reminder to enrol or change their details on the electoral roll
- ensure electors are aware of their voting options if they are unable to get to a polling place on election day, and
- support voter participation by ensuring electors are advised how to cast a formal vote as instructed on the ballot papers and are encouraged to turn out to vote on election day.

A range of public awareness materials will be produced to support New England voters. These materials include newspaper advertisements, media releases, as well as key information available at www.aec.gov.au/New-England and on the AEC's social media channels.

An *Official guide to the 2017 New England by-election* will be delivered to households across the electoral Division of New England during the early voting period. The guide will provide information on where, how and when to vote, what to do if you can't get to a polling place on election day and how to complete your ballot papers correctly. The guide will also be available on the AEC website, and in the alternate formats of large print, audio and e-text.

During the election period, the AEC's 13 23 26 telephone number will provide a specific New England by-election service which will operate from 8:30am to 5:30pm local New South Wales time.

A **telephone interpreter service** is available in 16 languages, and the National Relay Service is also available for voters (or any other person) who may need assistance contacting the AEC.

The AEC's [online enquiry form](#), which is always available, will be monitored and any enquiries received via this form will be answered in an efficient and accurate manner.

The AEC is committed to the provision of services through a range of channels. Should a member of the public be looking for information, wish to ask a question, provide feedback or make a complaint, they can do so online, on the phone or at an AEC office.

Prospective candidates will also be provided with a range of information and services. The [AEC website](#) serves as a central information hub providing candidate nomination forms and the candidates' handbook, which provides guidance on standing for election to the Australian Parliament. The AEC will also hold a face-to-face briefing for candidates to raise questions and be given assistance in accessing and understanding candidate information materials.

The AEC is committed to treating complaints seriously, promptly and in line with the AEC's [complaints management policy](#). Complaints received during the election period will be managed according to the principles and processes set out in the policy. Complaints about possible electoral fraud will be managed according to the AEC's fraud control policy and procedures. Information on how to report any suspected fraud is available on the [AEC website](#).

2. The AEC delivers a high quality service

Enrolment services

Australian citizens, aged 18 years of age or older, enrolled for the electoral Division of New England are required by law to vote in the by-election.

The electoral roll for the New England by-election will close at 8pm, Friday 3 November 2017. Voters are able to enrol or update their enrolment details online. Enrolment applications are also available at any AEC office or Australia Post outlets in the electoral Division of New England.

New England voters are able to [check their current electoral enrolment](#) online at any time during the election period.

Early voting services

New England voters who are entitled to cast an early vote can do so in person or by post.

A person is entitled to an early vote if, on by-election day, they:

- are outside the electoral division where they are enrolled to vote
- are more than 8km from a polling place
- are travelling
- are unable to leave their workplace to vote
- are seriously ill, infirm or due to give birth shortly (or caring for someone who is)
- are a patient in hospital and can't vote at the hospital
- have religious beliefs that prevent them from attending a polling place
- are in prison serving a sentence of less than three years or otherwise detained
- are a [silent elector](#)
- have a reasonable fear for their safety.

Early voting centres will be located in the electoral Division of New England and the details of these locations will be available at www.aec.gov.au/New-England. New England voters who are outside their division will be able to cast an early vote at **any AEC office** across Australia during weekday business hours from Tuesday 14 November 2017.

Alternatively, voters who are entitled to an early vote can apply for a postal vote online at www.aec.gov.au/New-England or on a paper application available at AEC offices. Postal vote applications must be received by the AEC before 6pm Wednesday 29 November 2017.

Overseas

New England voters who are living, working or holidaying overseas can apply online for a postal vote at www.aec.gov.au/New-England.

Mobile polling

AEC mobile polling teams will visit New England voters in hospitals and nursing homes who are not able to get to a polling place. The detail of the locations mobile polling teams will be visiting in the electoral Division of New England will be available at www.aec.gov.au/New-England.

Voting for people who are blind or have low vision

New England voters who are blind or have low vision will be able to vote via telephone. This service is operated by the AEC and allows registered voters to cast a secret vote from any location, without attending an AEC office or polling place. The blind or low vision telephone voting service is available between 8:30am and 5:30pm AEST Monday to Friday during the pre-poll period and 8am to 6pm on polling day on 1800 913 993.

Voting services on by-election day

On by-election day, Saturday 2 December 2017, New England voters will be able to vote between 8am and 6pm at any one of the 95 polling places that will be open across the electoral Division of New England.

A full list of polling places will be available at www.aec.gov.au/New-England.

3. Votes will be counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result

The AEC will ensure count processes produce a timely and accurate result and are managed in a transparent manner.

Candidates are not allowed to enter polling places, except in order to cast their own vote. They are not permitted to observe the counting of votes for elections in which they are candidates. They have the right to appoint scrutineers as personal representatives to observe both the voting and the counting of votes on their behalf at every polling place and scrutiny centre. A [scrutineer's handbook](#) is available to support the role of scrutineers.

The by-election results will be communicated to the public in a clear and timely way. The AEC's official results centre, the Tally Room on the AEC website, enables the public, candidates and scrutineers to follow vote counting on by-election night and progressive results until the final outcome is declared.

The Tally Room can be accessed on by-election night from 6pm and will be updated as results are entered into AEC systems. Divisional level results are available on by-election night, with individual polling place details available in the following week.

Counts conducted in polling places on by-election night provide indicative results only. As counting continues in the weeks following by-election night, updates are made to the Tally Room as re-checked results become available.

4. The public and stakeholders have confidence that the electoral process is well managed

The Electoral Act prescribes how a federal election, including a by-election, is to be conducted. All policies, processes and procedures implemented by the AEC during the by-election are designed to operate within the prescribed boundaries of the Electoral Act.

The AEC is committed: to delivering processes that uphold electoral integrity and engender voter and stakeholder trust in the result; and to ensuring the security and sanctity of the ballot paper at all times.

The AEC has in place, and will demonstrate at the by-election, clear and established safeguards for the handling of ballot papers by AEC staff, temporary election staff and contractors. This is supported by the use of visual identification requirements for AEC staff, visitors and scrutineers that provide for consistency across polling places and counting centres during the election.

Evaluating the AEC's performance

Performance measures have been developed to evaluate the AEC's delivery of the by-election and to determine if the standards in this service plan are met. They will assist the AEC in measuring its performance and identifying improvements in the future delivery of election services.

These measures also contribute to the AEC's overall key performance indicator – *that federal electoral events are successfully delivered*. The measures are detailed below against each of the standards outlined above.

Standard 1: Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information

Measures

The AEC will provide timely and accurate information using appropriate technology and channels

Details of voting centres (early voting centres and polling places) are published on the AEC website a minimum of 48 hours prior to being open to the public

Information published on the AEC website about the location and accessibility of voting centres (early voting centres and polling places) is accurate

Election results are published as soon as they are available

Standard 2: the AEC delivers a high quality service

Measures

AEC staff are courteous and professional in all their dealings with the public and candidates

Polling places are inspected and accurately assessed for accessibility

Enrolment claims received by the close of roll deadline are correctly processed

Postal vote packs are despatched within 3 business day of receipt of a valid and complete postal vote application (once ballot papers are available)

Voting locations (including early voting centres and polling places) open in accordance with advertised date/s and times

Standard 3: Votes will be counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result

Measures

After election night, accurate count information is progressively updated on the AEC website

Ballot papers (both used and unused) are accounted for¹

Standard 4: The public and stakeholders have confidence that the electoral process is well managed

Measures

The writ for the by-election is returned in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The AEC's conduct of the by-election is upheld in the event of any challenge in the Court of Disputed Returns

All instances of apparent multiple voting are reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes.

All instances of apparent non-voting are reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes.

For more information

Visit [AEC website](#) or contact us on 13 23 26.

¹ The AEC can account for ballot papers from the time they are printed, issued to an elector, placed in a ballot box (or discovered as discarded or returned as spoilt), counted and then placed in long term storage prior to statutorily authorised destruction. For ballot papers that are not issued the AEC can account for them from the time they are printed until statutorily authorised destruction.