

February 2017

# Report on the conduct of the 2016 federal election



# Overview

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## Introduction

The [2016 Federal Election Service Plan](#) (the service plan) outlines the key election services and standards that underpin the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC's) delivery of the 2016 federal election. The service plan defines a commitment to service which embodies the AEC values of ensuring electoral integrity through quality, agility and professionalism.

The AEC is committed to continuous evaluation and improvement, and seeks to measure and report on its performance based on the standards in the service plan.

This report outlines the conduct of the 2016 federal election by the AEC and details the performance against the AEC service standards.

## AEC service standards

The service plan contains four key service standards. The AEC will report on its performance against each of these standards. The standards are:

1. Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information.
2. The AEC delivers a high quality service.
3. Votes will be counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result.
4. The public and stakeholders have confidence that the electoral process is well managed.

## Evaluating the AEC's performance

To determine if the standards were met, 15 performance indicators were developed. They assist in measuring the AEC's performance against each standard and identifying improvements in the future delivery of election services.

These performance indicators also contribute to achieving the AEC's outcome:

*Maintain an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible voters through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services, and targeted education and public awareness programs.*

# Performance

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The AEC has set a target of 100 per cent for many of the performance indicators. This represents the ideal outcome and, for some, may be difficult to achieve when running an event of the size, scale and complexity of a double dissolution federal election. Nevertheless these targets are set to ensure our focus remains on finding ways to improve the AEC's performance as an agency and the services offered to the Australian people.

The assessment of performance against performance indicators is shown in Appendix A.

## 1. Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information

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

The AEC made available information to voters about the federal election through multiple channels including:

- The AEC website, accessed by 9.6 million users over the election period, including 1.8 million on election day.
- The AEC contact centre, which commenced operation on 2 May 2016, received and responded to over 700,000 telephone and email enquiries.
- The Tally Room website and media feed that provided election results.
- Advertising in multiple channels including television, radio, press and online, as well as media engagement and public relations activities.
- Social media, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, along with AEC's corporate Facebook content reaching more than 7 million unique Facebook users in the week leading up to election day.
- The *official guide to the 2016 federal election* was delivered to more than 10.3 million households Australia wide.
- Conducting community electoral education sessions, including sessions for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) audiences.
- The Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) consulted 181 Indigenous communities on the location of polling places, and reached 1,440,135 people through its Indigenous Facebook page.

Key information conveyed through these channels was updated to reflect the key phases of the election. Major updates were made to support the close of rolls phase, the early voting phase, and how to cast a formal vote in the lead up to election day.

The benchmarking and tracking research into the advertising campaign recorded significant increases in voter understanding of how to vote correctly above and below the line on the Senate ballot paper – from 45 percent (during the benchmarking phase) to 90 percent for how to vote correctly above the line, as well as confirming that people who recalled the AEC’s communication campaign were more likely to recall the correct way to vote.

## **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**

There were 12 instances where voting centre details were not published on the AEC website 48 hours prior to being open to the public. These were primarily due to issues with the suitability of premises necessitating a late change.

In addition, for some remote mobile polling, the schedule was adjusted to deal with access issues caused by inclement weather or limitations to access proposed by remote community members. In these circumstances, where the 48 hour timeframe could not be achieved, direct contact was made with political parties and community contacts.

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

Nationally there were 6,773 voting centres in operation for the 2016 federal election, comprising both early voting centres and election day polling places. The AEC took steps to improve the availability of voting centre accessibility information to help voters make an informed decision based on their personal circumstances regarding how and where to cast their ballot. This included, a separate web page being published for 97.4% of voting centres providing specific accessibility information. An accessibility rating was published for all voting centres at the 2016 federal election.

## **Election results are published as soon as they are available**

House of Representatives and Senate votes counted in voting centres are recorded progressively following the close of polls. The Tally Room website publishes the results every three minutes from 6pm on election day.

The Tally Room website serviced over 200,000 users on election night (from 6pm - midnight) and generated around 3.7 million page views.

## 2. The AEC delivers a high quality service

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

The AEC's election workforce comprised of a permanent workforce of around 800 and a temporary workforce filling 86,938 election positions over the election period. All of these staff undergo training. Staff who take on supervisory or other critical roles will have completed online training, face-to-face training and undergone a police check in all but exceptional circumstances.

The measure of this indicator is based upon the number of complaints received by the AEC relating to staff behaviour. The AEC can receive complaints through many channels and has processes in place to allow all complaints to be recorded centrally. Complaints are dealt with according to the AEC's Complaints Management Policy.

As at 30 August 2016, the AEC had received eight allegations relating to discourteous or unprofessional behaviour towards members of the public or candidates.

Each allegation has been accepted as the complainant's perception of events, and is recorded, responded to and referred to the relevant AEC State Manager for consideration and action as appropriate. If deemed necessary, a complaint may also be subject to further action in line with established AEC processes.

There were no recorded occurrences of complaints raised in the media concerning staff behaviour.

### **Polling places are inspected and accurately assessed for accessibility**

All premises used for polling places are expected to be inspected prior to the federal election to ensure they meet AEC requirements across a range of areas. This information, including accessibility assessment, is maintained in a central database and is used for a number of purposes. For the 2016 federal election, 12 premises were not inspected for accessibility.

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

The close of roll deadline for the 2016 federal election was 8pm, 23 May 2016. This is the time prior to which electors could submit a claim for enrolment, or update their enrolment details, for the federal election. There were 687,788 claims received from the election announcement on 8 May 2016 to the close of rolls. All were correctly processed for inclusion on the certified list for the 2016 federal election.

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

There were 1,510,640 postal voting packs despatched to voters, of which 99.4 per cent were despatched within three days of the AEC receiving a postal vote application.

The remaining postal voting packs were delivered to electors using a range of delivery methods, including courier and in-person deliveries, to maximise the time available for a voter to receive and return their postal vote.

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

There were 6,773 voting centres in the federal election, comprised of early voting centres open between 14 June 2016 and election day, and polling places open on election day only. There were 30 instances when voting locations opened outside the times advertised, representing 0.4 per cent of all locations. Six of these instances were outside AEC control and were due to fire alarms or electrical issues; fifteen of these instances were for a duration of less than 30 minutes.

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

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

The fresh scrutiny of votes continues after election night and the Tally Room website is updated every 15 minutes, with a timestamp indicating when results were last updated.

### **Ballot papers (both used and unused) are accounted for**

The AEC can account for ballot papers from the time they are printed, issued to a voter, 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.

There are no instances where ballot papers are known to be unaccounted for.

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

### **The writs for the federal election are returned in accordance with the relevant legislation**

The writs for the 2016 federal election were returned on the legislated date of 8 August 2016.

### **The AEC's conduct of the federal election is upheld in the event of any challenge in the Court of Disputed Returns**

A candidate, voter or the AEC may dispute the validity of an election by a petition to the High Court which sits as the Court of Disputed Returns. Disputes are to be filed within 40 days of the return of the writ for the election. One petition was made which was subsequently overtaken by events and not proceeded with by the court.

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

The AEC identifies apparent multiple voters through an examination of the scanned certified lists for their electoral division as soon as possible after election day. Following completion of the AEC investigations, letters were sent to apparent multiple voters on 29 August 2016. Where no response was received to the first letter, follow-up letters were sent on 13 September 2016. Further reminder letters were sent on 17 October 2016. Responses to these letters resulted in 53% of recipients requiring no further action due to confirmation of a match to a non-voter record, the identification of polling official or scanning error or the death of the voter since election day.

The AEC does not have authority to prosecute apparent multiple voting offences, but works with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) to have these cases considered for prosecution.

In December 2016 the AEC and the AFP conducted a joint assessment process on the remaining apparent multiple voters, with the majority of cases assessed as having insufficient evidence to prove a multiple voting offence occurred. Following the joint assessment process the AEC formally referred 76 cases to the AFP for further investigation and, where necessary, referral to the CDPP.

The legislated deadline for the commencement of prosecution action by the CDPP is 12 months following election day.



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

The AEC identifies apparent non-voters through an examination of the scanned certified lists. Following this, letters were sent to 965,378 apparent non-voters in the week commencing 19 September 2016. If no response was received to this letter, a follow-up letter was sent in the week commencing 31 October 2016. If there was still no response, a final reminder letter was sent in the week commencing 8 December 2016.

After this process, if the AEC determines that there is no valid and sufficient reason for not voting, the person in question is required to pay an administrative penalty of \$20. In cases where neither a response to the notice or payment was received by the due date, the matter may be referred to the courts. In these cases the individual is liable to pay a maximum fine of \$180 (plus court costs), and a criminal conviction may be recorded. The court process in these cases is managed by the AEC in cooperation with the CDDP. The AEC is scheduled to commence non-voter prosecutions by mid-April 2017.

# Appendix A

The tables below show the assessment of performance for the 2016 federal election for each indicator within the service standards.

<b>Standard 1: Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information</b>		
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Result</b>
The AEC will provide timely and accurate information using appropriate technology and channels	Always	Achieved
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	100%	99.8%
Information published on the AEC website about the location and accessibility of voting centres (early voting centres and polling places) is accurate	100%	100%
Election results are published as soon as they are available	100%	100%

<b>Standard 2: The AEC delivers a high quality service</b>		
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Result</b>
AEC staff are courteous and professional in all their dealings with the public and candidates	Always	Achieved
Polling places are inspected and accurately assessed for accessibility	100%	99.8%
Enrolment claims received by the close of roll deadline are correctly processed	100%	100%
Postal vote packs are despatched within 3 business day of receipt of a valid and complete postal vote application (once ballot papers are available)	100%	99.4%
Voting locations (including early voting centres and polling places) open in accordance with advertised date/s and times	100%	99.6%

<b>Standard 3: Votes will be counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result</b>		
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Result</b>
After election night, accurate count information is progressively updated on the AEC website	At least once per day	Achieved
Ballot papers (both used and unused) are accounted for <sup>1</sup>	100%	Achieved

<b>Standard 4: The public and stakeholders have confidence that the electoral process is well managed</b>		
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Result</b>
The writs for the federal election are returned in accordance with the relevant legislation	Returned by date specified	Achieved
The AEC's conduct of the federal election is upheld in the event of any challenge in the Court of Disputed Returns	All	One petition lodged which was not proceeded with by the court
All instances of apparent multiple voting are reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes	Always	Process for dealing with apparent multiple voting underway
All instances of apparent non-voting are reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes	Always	Process for dealing with apparent non-voting underway

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<sup>1</sup> The AEC can account for ballot papers from the time they are printed, issued to a voter, 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.