

Review of Public Access Terminal operating model

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Abstract

This report presents the public findings of the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) internal review of Public Access Terminals (PATs). The review assessed the suitability of the current model for providing public inspection of the Commonwealth electoral roll under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act), including the associated privacy, safety and operational risks. It also considered current operating arrangements, alternative channels for enrolment verification and objections, and initiatives for reducing residual risk while maintaining legislative compliance. The review found that the nationally consistent single PAT model provides a more controlled approach to public roll access, but that longer-term consideration of the legislative framework may be required to address the underlying risks associated with public visibility of residential address information.

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Executive summary

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is required under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act) to provide public inspection of the Commonwealth electoral roll. The AEC currently fulfils this obligation through a network of Public Access Terminals (PATs) located in AEC offices.

In recent years, the AEC has identified increasing risks associated with the PAT operating model, including risks relating to privacy, elector safety, staff wellbeing and broader misuse of roll information. These risks have emerged alongside changing community expectations regarding privacy, advances in digital service delivery and a changing threat environment.

On 23 December 2025, the AEC announced an internal review of PATs. The review considered the suitability of PATs as a means of providing public access to the electoral roll, examined the risks associated with the current approach, and considered initiatives for future service delivery.

During the review period, the AEC introduced a nationally consistent operating model comprising a single PAT per office, supported by a booking process and strengthened oversight arrangements. This model was informed by operational testing in Western Australia and was implemented across the national network during the review period.

The review found that:

- PATs continue to provide a mechanism by which the AEC can meet its legislative obligations to provide public inspection of the electoral roll.
- The nationally consistent single PAT model is operationally viable, improves consistency across the network, and supports fair access to inspect the electoral roll
- Patterns of PAT use vary across the network. This is consistent with the different scope of roll information available by office type.
- Feedback received during implementation did not indicate that electors were unable to verify their enrolment details or initiate objection processes through available channels.
- Notwithstanding operational improvements, the current model continues to present residual privacy, safety and misuse risks that cannot be fully mitigated through operational controls alone.

Importantly, the review found that the principal source of residual risk is not the PAT technology itself, but the legislative requirement to provide public inspection of residential address information and the limited capacity under current legislative settings to restrict the manner or purpose of access.

Accordingly, the review supports:

- continued operation of the nationally consistent single PAT model as the AEC's preferred operating arrangement for public roll access; and
- continued provision of advice on the operational impacts, risks and limitations associated with the current legislative framework governing public access to electoral roll information.

These outcomes support the AEC to continue meeting its legislative obligations while strengthening protections for electors and staff, improving operational consistency, and supporting confidence in the integrity of Australia's electoral system.

Introduction

Background

Public access to the Commonwealth electoral roll is a longstanding feature of Australia's electoral framework. The AEC currently provides this access through PATs located in offices across the national network.

On 23 December 2025, the AEC announced an internal review of PATs, following earlier analysis and operational testing undertaken in 2025. The review was initiated to consider the suitability of the current model, the risks associated with PAT access, and the implications for the future provision of public roll access.

The review builds on preparatory work undertaken in 2025, as well as operational lessons from a Western Australia (WA) trial of a reduced PAT footprint and controlled booking arrangements. The WA trial informed the development of a nationally consistent operating model. During the review period, and in response to identified risks, the AEC progressed this model nationally, with its implementation informing the review's findings and conclusions.

Legislative context

Section 90A of the Electoral Act requires the AEC to make a copy of the electoral roll available for public inspection, free of charge, at AEC offices during office hours. Capital city offices are required to provide access to state and territory rolls, while divisional offices must provide access to the roll for their respective division.

Under section 83 of the Electoral Act, the information made available for public inspection includes each elector's surname, given names, and place of living (residential address), excluding certain categories of electors such as silent electors, eligible overseas electors and itinerant electors.

Public access to the electoral roll has long been part of the legislative framework. Relevant explanatory material indicates that this access supports transparency, enables electors to verify their own enrolment, and supports the electoral objection process. However, the Electoral Act does not prescribe how inspection must be delivered, nor does it place explicit limits on the manner or purpose of inspection. This limits the AEC's ability to tailor access arrangements in response to contemporary privacy, safety and security considerations.

Purpose of this report

This report presents the public findings of the AEC's internal review of PATs. The report:

- examines the suitability of PATs as a means of providing public access to the electoral roll,
- outlines the current PAT operating arrangements,
- summarises the key privacy, safety, misuse and operational issues identified by the review,
- considers initiatives for reducing residual risk while maintaining public roll access as required by law, and

- sets out the AEC's recommended operating approach and identifies broader legislative, operational and stakeholder considerations relevant to the management of residual risk.

Current PAT arrangements

PAT operating model

In accordance with legislative requirements and office type, PATs are configured to display different electoral roll datasets. Capital city offices provide access to the full national roll, while divisional offices provide access only to the relevant divisional roll or rolls.

In 2023, the AEC reviewed PAT access settings across the network and reduced roll visibility to align more closely with the legislative requirement for office specific access. At the same time, new PAT hardware was deployed across the network as part of broader workplace technology changes.

Operational testing undertaken in WA in late 2025 considered a reduced-footprint model comprising a single PAT supported by a booking process, strengthened reception oversight and advance public notice. That trial informed the development of a nationally consistent operating model.

Under the current model, access to PATs is managed through a single terminal per office, supported by bookings of 15-minute slots (available for up to one hour per day) to enable electors to verify their enrolment and, where relevant, complete objection processes. Public notices were displayed in offices before the changes commenced, and the revised model was implemented across May and June 2026.

Usage and demand

PAT usage is unevenly distributed across the AEC network. During the rollout period six capital city offices accounted for almost 93 per cent of all searches nationally. The remaining offices experience comparatively low levels of PAT use and account for less than five per cent of searches nationally.

This uneven demand profile is relevant to both service delivery and risk management. Offices with higher demand are subsequently more likely to experience access pressure, booking enquiries and the need to manage public expectations. The booking process has improved visibility over how PAT access is being used and where demand is highest.

Public feedback

During implementation, members of the public were actively encouraged to provide feedback through established AEC channels. During the rollout period the number of individual PAT users was more than seven hundred, and five pieces of feedback were received or captured through the AEC's formal channels. The feedback primarily related to users seeking PAT access for purposes beyond enrolment verification or objection processes.

However, feedback formally received did not indicate that electors were unable to verify their enrolment details or initiate objection processes through available channels. This supports the review's finding that alternative channels remain fit-for-purpose and available for those core purposes.

Current controls and operating arrangements

The nationally consistent single PAT model introduced additional controls designed to reduce the risks associated with PAT access while continuing to meet legislative obligations.

These controls include:

- one PAT per office
- booking-based access arrangements
- staff oversight of PAT use
- public notices explaining access arrangements and conditions of use
- guidance, escalation pathways and complaint-handling processes
- central monitoring of bookings, feedback and operational issues.

Together, these controls have strengthened oversight and improved consistency in how PAT access is managed across the network. However, they remain administrative and operational controls and do not remove the underlying risks associated with public visibility of residential address information.

Risk considerations

The review identified residual risks associated with PAT access across several domains, including:

- privacy
- elector safety
- staff safety and wellbeing
- operational consistency
- information security
- legislative and compliance constraints.

While the nationally consistent single PAT model has reduced some operational exposure and improved oversight, the review found that residual risk remains under the current legislative framework. In particular, the review found that the public visibility of residential address information continues to create privacy and safety concerns that cannot be fully mitigated through operational controls alone.

Alternative channels for enrolment verification and objections

PATs are not the only mechanism through which electors may verify enrolment details or through which roll integrity may be supported. The AEC provides alternative channels including:

- the Online Enrolment Verification Facility (OEVF), which allows electors to verify their own enrolment details online
- telephone and written confirmation of enrolment
- acknowledgement letters issued following successful enrolment transactions
- private objections, which allow individuals to raise concerns about another person's enrolment
- official objections, which may be initiated by the AEC based on other available information.

Taken together, these channels demonstrate that enrolment verification and objection processes are available through multiple pathways that do not rely solely on PAT access.

Review findings

The review found that PATs continue to provide a mechanism by which the AEC can meet its legislative obligations to make the electoral roll available for public inspection.

Further insights include:

- the nationally consistent single PAT model provides a more controlled and consistent approach to public access than previous arrangements. It improves operational consistency, strengthens oversight and reduces some immediate access and supervision risks.
- the current PAT model is increasingly misaligned with contemporary expectations regarding privacy, safety and secure service delivery. PATs remain legally effective as a means of access, but the model is not optimal as a long-term service arrangement.
- residual risk remains material under the current legislative framework, particularly because of the requirement to make residential address information publicly inspectable.

Concurrent to this review, in June 2026 the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) has recommended that the Australian Government consider legislative measures to address identified privacy and safety risks associated with public access to electoral roll information. Any changes to the legislative framework would be a matter for the Australian Government and Parliament. Such changes may also have broader implications beyond the AEC, including for jurisdictions that operate within legislative frameworks providing for public inspection of electoral roll information.

Initiatives for addressing residual risk

The review considered initiatives for reducing residual risk while maintaining the roll access required for electors to verify their enrolment and initiate appropriate electoral roll objections. The following two initiatives have been endorsed.

Initiative 1

Continue the nationally consistent single PAT model

The review found that continued operation of the nationally consistent single PAT model is the most feasible operating arrangement to mitigate risk. It maintains legislative compliance, improves consistency across the network, and supports more structured oversight of PAT access.

Initiative 2

Legislative considerations relating to residual risk

The review found that the most significant residual risks arise from legislative requirements relating to public inspection of residential address information and the limited capacity under current settings to narrow the manner or purpose of access. These risks cannot be fully mitigated through operational controls alone. While the nationally consistent single PAT model has reduced some operational and supervisory risks, residual privacy, safety and misuse risks remain due to the legislative requirement to provide public inspection of electoral roll information.

Conclusion

The AEC remains committed to meeting its legislative obligations while protecting the privacy, safety and security of electors and staff. The nationally consistent single PAT model provides a more controlled approach to public roll access and improves consistency across the network. However, the review found that some residual risks arise from legislative requirements relating to public access to electoral roll information and cannot be fully mitigated through operational controls alone. Any changes to the legislative framework remain matters for Government and Parliament.