

28 May 2020

# Eden-Monaro by-election Service Plan

May 2020

# Foreword

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The AEC is committed to providing the highest standard of electoral services for the Eden-Monaro by-election. During the COVID-19 pandemic this includes a range of safety measures for voters, AEC staff and other participants.

We have introduced a range of COVID-19 safety measures at voting venues and also through the entire by-election process, including the receipt and declaration of nominations, the management of election materials and at our counting centre.

The operating model for this by-election includes social distancing and hygiene measures that conform with federal and local health advice and are also within the legislative framework of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. The infection-control advice the AEC is following has been provided by the Australian Government's Chief Medical Officer, and relevant NSW and ACT health authorities.

It is also important to note these measures, which must be enacted to protect the community, will inevitably slow the voting process. Whilst we are implementing measures to try and reduce this impact, the AEC thanks all electors and participants for their patience and adherence to the new measures in the polling place and at our count centre.

The counting of votes will also take longer due to the measures in place in polling places and at our counting centre. The expected increase in postal and pre-poll votes cast will also impact the speed of the count, noting the legislative requirement to wait 13 days after election day for the return of postal votes.

As a result, it is likely to take longer to formally declare a final result in this by-election compared with previous federal by-elections but, as per our normal practice, the AEC will do everything possible to provide an indicative result on polling night.

The AEC is committed to continuous improvement. This service plan outlines the key election services and standards that will underpin the AEC's delivery of the 2020 Eden-Monaro by-election during a pandemic.

Should you have any comments on the service plan or the AEC's delivery on these commitments, I would ask you to take the time to let us know through our [online enquiry form](#) so we can consider your feedback as we continue to improve the delivery of election services.

Tom Rogers  
Electoral Commissioner

# COVID-19 related measures for the Eden-Monaro by-election

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It is also important to note these measures, which must be put in place to protect the community, will inevitably slow the voting process. Whilst we are implementing measures to try and reduce this impact, the AEC thanks all electors and participants for their patience and adherence to the new measures in the polling places and at our count centre.

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This document outlines the ways in which the key processes in the operation of the by-election will be modified or enhanced.

## Taking nominations

People wishing to nominate for the by-election will need to make an appointment with the Divisional Returning Officer for Eden-Monaro before attending the AEC office to lodge their nomination forms. At the office, hand sanitiser will be available at the entrance, on all meeting tables, and on the way out. AEC staff may wear surgical masks, and social distancing of 1.5 metres will be in place wherever possible between staff and nominees.

Where possible AEC staff will also seek to minimise the amount of back-and-forth handling of forms. Contactless Eftpos facilities will be available for candidates to pay their nomination fee.

## Ballot draw

Social-distancing rules will apply to everybody attending the ballot draw and seating will be appropriately spaced. Hand sanitiser will be at the entrance and exit of the venue.

AEC staff performing the ballot draw will observe necessary personal hygiene measures and sanitise the equipment used.

## During training

Our online training suite has been enhanced to include a new online training module on the required health measures put in place for this by-election. This will be mandatory for all AEC staff and temporary election workers working at this by-election. Where AEC staff conduct face-to-face training, social-distancing rules will be observed and all of the health measures that will be applied throughout the by-election will also be observed throughout the corresponding practical exercises. Hand sanitiser will be available on arrival and exit, and participants will wash or sanitise their hands before and after each practical exercise.

## Voting for residents of aged care facilities and hospital patients

The AEC is very conscious of the health and safety of voters during the by-election; particularly those who are potentially vulnerable to infection. Accordingly, we have adopted special measures to protect residents of aged care facilities and hospitals in the Eden-Monaro electorate during these extraordinary times, whilst still ensuring they can exercise their right to vote. Based on medical advice, the AEC will be providing effective alternatives to mobile polling (which are normally a feature of electoral events). Specifically, the AEC has established a support team for these facilities and has already provided enrolment forms and general postal vote applications for residents to complete and return to the AEC. Residents of aged care facilities and hospitals will have the option to either vote via a postal vote delivered directly to their facility; telephone voting for those who are blind or low vision; or by attending a polling location (depending on their personal circumstances), which will have health and safety measures in place.

The AEC will also maintain ongoing contact with aged care facilities and relevant hospitals in the Division of Eden-Monaro to provide support, answer questions and deliver additional enrolment and postal vote application forms, if needed.

## Blind and Low Vision

Voters who are blind or have low vision can cast a vote in secret by telephone from any location for the Eden-Monaro by-election.

Telephone voting is a simple two-step process, voters who are blind or have low vision will be invited to register for a telephone vote by calling a dedicated 1800 number for this election. They will not need to give their name when they vote using the telephone voting service. Their registration number and pin will be used to mark their name off the electoral roll, ensuring the voter's identity remains secret.

## Postal voting

Postal voting will be an important voting option available to eligible Eden-Monaro electors. Postal voting helps minimise contact and movement, and given the COVID-19 environment, it is anticipated that a greater number of voters will meet the eligibility criteria under the legislation to apply for a postal vote in this by-election.

## Voting at polling places



If on arrival voters are not able to immediately enter the polling place, they will be required to queue outside where social-distancing rules will be in place. Extra queue controllers that have been appropriately trained in social-distancing rules and the traditional “six-metre rule” regarding campaigners will be outside the polling place to ensure adherence to these important measures.

The number of voters entering a polling place will be counted at the door to limit the number of people inside the polling place at any one time. Hand sanitiser will be available at the entrance to the polling place and at each ballot-paper issuing point and when exiting the polling place. Signage about hygiene and social distancing will be prominent in the polling place for voters and staff.

Where possible a “sneeze shield” will be installed at all ballot-paper issuing points, and issuing tables will be sprayed regularly with sanitising spray throughout the day and whenever issuing staff are rotated. Voters will be encouraged to bring their own pencil or pen to the polling place but electors will also be offered a single-use pencil when handed their ballot papers.

Voting screens will be separated by a distance of 1.5 metres and the plastic writing surface inserted into the voting screen will be regularly cleaned with sanitising spray throughout polling day.

AEC staff may wear surgical masks and will under no circumstances share their bibs or lanyards with other staff. Bio-hazard bags will be used for the disposal of surgical masks, gloves and cleaning cloth waste.

Photo opportunities of the inside of a polling place will only be allowed when there is a sufficiently low number of voters present so social distancing can be maintained, and when the Officer-in-Charge approves.

## Campaigning at polling places

Whilst the AEC has no legislative jurisdiction or responsibility for campaigners outside six metres of the entrance to the polling place, we acknowledge that the current COVID-19 environment may impact on their ability to hand out how-to-vote cards as they ordinarily would for any other federal electoral event. Parties and candidates will need to ensure that those campaigning on their behalf near a polling venue have fully informed themselves of NSW Government health restrictions and laws in place regarding social distancing, and that they abide by these directives.

Acknowledging the challenges faced by parties and candidates for this by-election, the AEC has decided to assist parties and candidates by seeking to collect the details of all candidate’s official campaign website addresses at the time of nomination. The AEC will

provide a link to these websites which will be available on the AEC website alongside the candidate's details.

## Counting on election night at polling places

After 6pm, when the counting commences at polling places, hand sanitiser for all polling place officials and scrutineers will be at the polling place entry point, at each sorting and counting table, and at the exit to the polling place.

Ballot boxes will be cleaned with sanitising spray before they are opened for counting on the tables. Staff will sanitise their hands immediately before and after they handle ballot-box tags.

Surgical masks may be worn by both staff and scrutineers, and no sharing of bibs or lanyards will be allowed. If practicable, "sneeze shields" may be used at each counting and sorting table to separate scrutineers from counting staff.

There will be signs outlining the hygiene and social distancing rules, and those who do not adhere to the rules will be requested to leave.

The area used for polling and counting at each polling place will be fully cleaned after election night.

## Counting at AEC out-posted centres

Hand sanitiser will be available at the entry and exit of the out-posted centre (OPC), at each sorting and counting table and in break-out areas.

The outside surfaces of election materials returned to the OPC – including ballot boxes transported on election night from pre-poll voting centres – will be cleaned with sanitising spray on arrival.

Ballot boxes will be cleaned with sanitising spray before opening, and staff will wash or sanitise their hands after handling ballot-box tags, and before and after each count of ballot papers. Surgical masks may be worn both by staff and scrutineers and, if practicable, "sneeze shields" will be used at each counting and sorting table to separate scrutineers from counting staff.

The OPC will be set up with prominent hygiene signage and 1.5-metre standard markings on the floor. There will be regular cleaning of surfaces, equipment and break-out areas during operational hours. Only single-use water bottles will be allowed, all plates and cutlery must be disposable, and there will be no provision for the serving of coffee or tea inside.

All equipment used for scrutiny will be cleaned before installing and it will also be regularly cleaned during use and before return. Additional Security Officers and Hygiene Officers will be present in the OPC to ensure everyone's safety and adherence to the health measures. They will be wearing distinctive bibs.

Deep cleaning of the OPC will occur overnight and at the conclusion of the counting. Biohazard bags will be used to dispose of all waste from the clearing process.

## When counting postal votes

The outside of all transport containers used by Australia Post or couriers will be sprayed with sanitising spray prior to opening.

Hand sanitiser will be regularly applied by staff before opening batches of postal-vote envelopes and the extraction of ballot papers. Staff will also wash or sanitise their hands immediately before and after each count or when they handle batches of ballot papers.

Surgical masks should be worn by both staff and scrutineers.

## At the declaration of the poll

Social-distancing rules will apply to all in attendance and seating will be appropriately spaced. Hand sanitiser will be at the entrance and exit of the venue.

# Achieving the AEC Service Standards

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The AEC is committed to upholding five key service standards.

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

The AEC will conduct a public information and education campaign and will deliver an official guide for the by-election to households across the division. Information will also be available on the AEC website including information in accessible formats. The AEC will provide services to assist people living with disability to ensure they are not disadvantaged from participating in the electoral process.

Prospective candidates will also be provided with a range of information and services. The AEC website serves as a central information hub providing guidance on standing for election to Parliament.

## Standard 1: Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information

### Achieved by:

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

Details of voting centres (early voting centres and polling places) will be 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) will be accurate.

Preliminary results will be published as soon as they are available.

## Standard 2: The AEC delivers a high-quality service

### Achieved by:

AEC staff will be courteous and professional in all their dealings with the public and candidates.

Polling places will be inspected and assessed for accessibility. Polling place accessibility rankings will be made available on the AEC website.

Enrolment claims received by the Close of Roll deadline will be processed in time for the by-election.

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Postal vote packs will be dispatched upon receipt of a valid and complete application (once ballot papers are available), according to the following timeline:

- Prior to the Monday before election day
  - Paper postal vote applications – within five business days of receipt
  - Online postal vote applications – within three business days of receipt.
- From the Monday before polling day
  - Paper and online – within two business day of receipt.

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Voting locations (including early voting centres and polling places) will open in accordance with advertised dates and times.

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

#### **Achieved by:**

After by-election night, accurate count information will be progressively updated on the AEC website.

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Ballot papers (both used and unused) will be accounted for.<sup>1</sup>

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

#### **Achieved by:**

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

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The AEC's conduct of the by-election is upheld in the event of any challenges to results taken to the Court of Disputed Returns.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> The AEC will follow established processes to 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. The AEC will also follow established processes to account for ballot papers that are not issued, from the time they are printed until statutorily authorised destruction.

## Standard 5: By-election processes will conform with federal, state and local health advice

### Achieved by:

The by-election will be delivered in accordance with the COVID-19 operating model (incorporated in this service plan) as endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer, and reviewed by NSW and ACT health authorities.

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## Further information

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For more information on the Eden-Monaro by-election visit the [AEC website](#) or call 13 23 26.

Download the COVIDSafe app at [covid-safe.gov.au](https://covid-safe.gov.au).

Information in this service plan reflects circumstances at the time of publishing. The AEC will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and follow the advice from federal and state health authorities. This may result in changes to measures put in place.