

# Delivering the 2026 Farrer By-election

## SERVICE PLAN

February 2026

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# Foreword

At the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), we are committed to meticulously planning and delivering electoral services with the highest possible level of electoral integrity. This means operating in accordance with the legislative framework of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) and performing our functions with service excellence at the core.

This service plan outlines our election service standards, which will underpin the delivery of the 2026 by-election. These standards ensure that our service delivery and regulatory performance engenders confidence, that Australians trust the by-election result, and that the AEC remains a world leader in electoral management. Votes will be counted and results made available as swiftly as possible, noting the requirements of the Electoral Act are such that in complex or close counts, results will take longer to finalise.

As we do for all electoral events, we have carefully assessed voting services available across the division with a view to providing the greatest possible equity of access for voters, while balancing venue availability, and the need for safety of voters, election staff and political participants like candidates, campaigners and scrutineers.

Elections are at the heart of our democracy. We do everything possible to facilitate a safe and positive experience for all, and we call on all those participating to assist us by engaging respectfully with each other, voters and our staff.

The AEC remains committed to continuous improvement and has taken lessons from our experiences conducting recent electoral events. Should you have any comments on the Service Plan or the AEC's delivery of these commitments, please let us know through our [online enquiry form](#).



A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, consisting of the letters 'JP' intertwined.

**Jeff Pope**

Australian Electoral Commissioner

# Agency purpose

The AEC is the independent statutory authority responsible for the conduct of federal elections, referendums, and by-elections. Our purpose is to 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.

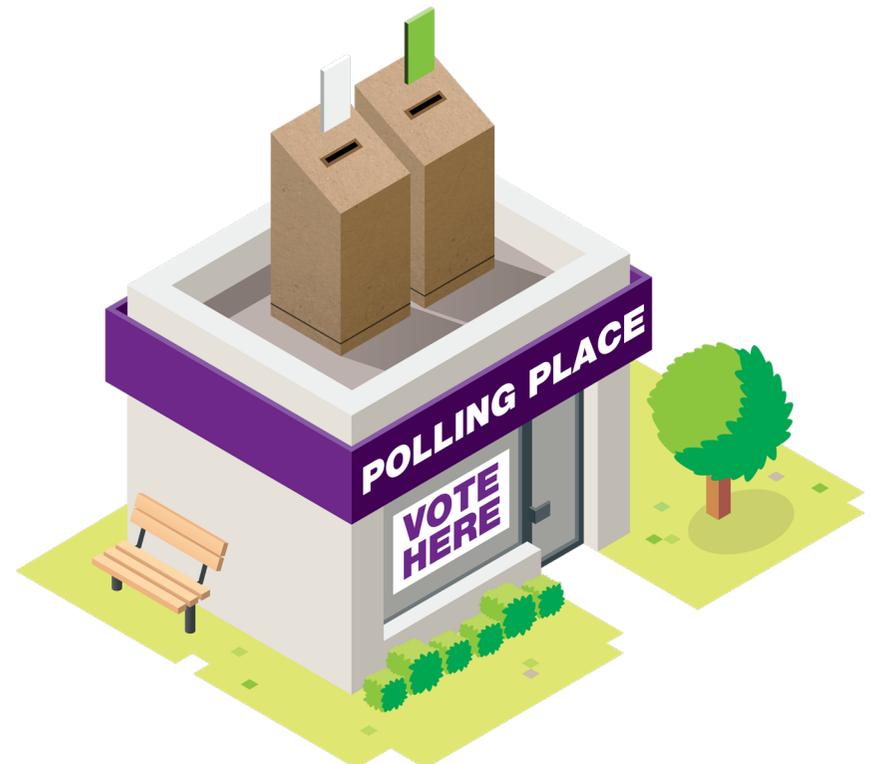
In line with the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) and the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* (Referendum Act), we do this by:

- conducting successful electoral events, including federal elections, by-elections and referendums
- upholding electoral integrity and public confidence in a neutral and independent electoral system
- maintaining and ensuring confidence in the Commonwealth Electoral Roll, including roll accuracy and security
- regulating political party registrations and maintaining the Register of Political Parties
- supporting participants in elections and referendums to comply with legislation regarding financial disclosure and authorisation of electoral communications
- supporting electoral redistributions to ensure equal representation across the country
- helping Australians understand the democratic process and their right and responsibility to enrol and vote.

Compulsory voting maintains a high level of participation in electoral processes and the AEC works hard across the electoral cycle to increase opportunities to engage and enhance access for all eligible Australians.

# AEC and APS values

The AEC values are an essential component of our operating environment and frame how AEC staff work. The AEC's focus is on electoral integrity through the values of **quality, agility, and professionalism**. These values work in tandem with the **Australian Public Service (APS) values**: impartial, committed to service, accountable, respectful, ethical and stewardship.



# Supporting electoral participation

Australia has one of the most comprehensive election service offerings in the world – where eligible voters can access their vote in a range of ways: voting at a polling place on polling day, pre-poll voting, postal voting, mobile polling, or telephone voting for those who are blind, have low vision or are in Antarctica.

Some people need additional support to be able to equitably participate. The AEC takes a genuine approach to community engagement, and works throughout the electoral cycle to provide information, education and enrolment support for those who face barriers to participation.

This means we:

- ensure we deliver accessible information and services for people with disability, including the provision of information in a range of formats, and where possible ensuring polling places are accessible including availability of assistive technology
- ensure our information is available in language where required, for people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background; and is culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- provide mobile polling in eligible locations for people experiencing homelessness, people in remote areas, and people in health facilities and residential aged care homes.



# By-election timetable

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

These steps, according to the Australian Constitution and the Electoral Act begin with the issue of the writ (the document commanding an electoral official to hold the by-election) and end with the return of the writ after the results are declared.

**The federal by-election will be conducted according to the following timetable.**

Activity	Timetable
<b>01 Issue of the writ</b>	The writ is issued by the Speaker following a vacancy (Constitution s.33, Electoral Act s.154).
<b>02 Close of rolls</b>	Rolls close at 8pm, seven days after the issue of writ (Electoral Act s.155).
<b>03 Close of candidate nominations</b>	Nominations close at 12 noon on the day specified in the writ, between 10 and 27 days after the issue of the writ (Electoral Act ss.156, 175).
<b>04 Declaration of candidate nominations</b>	Nominations are publicly declared 24 hours after nominations close (Electoral Act ss.175(2), 176).
<b>05 Pre-poll voting commences</b>	Pre-poll voting must not be earlier than 12 days before polling day (Electoral Act ss.200D, 200BA). In addition, pre-poll voting must not take place on a public holiday in that state or territory.
<b>06 Mobile polling commences</b>	Mobile polling commences up to 12 days before polling day (Electoral Act s.227(5)).
<b>07 Last day for receipt of postal vote applications</b>	Postal vote applications must be submitted by 6pm on the Wednesday prior to polling day (Electoral Act s.184(5)).
<b>08 Polling day</b>	Polling day is fixed on a Saturday between 23 and 31 days after the date of nominations (Electoral Act s.157, 158).
<b>09 Last day for receipt of postal votes</b>	Postal votes must be received by 13 days after polling day (Electoral Act s.194(2)).
<b>10 Return of the writs (latest date)</b>	The writ must be returned within 100 days of issue (Electoral Act s.159).

**Note** The by-election timetable will be made available on the AEC website after the issue of the writ.

# By-election delivery

The AEC election delivery principles underpin delivery at the by-election.

## Integrity of the result

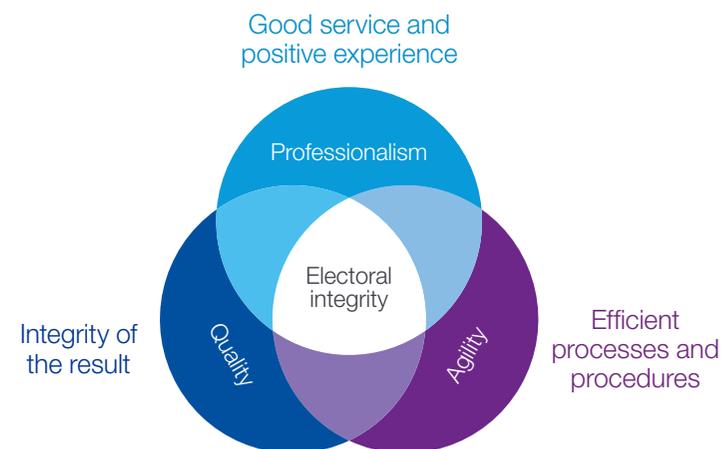
- safe custody and handling of ballot papers
- maintaining integrity of a person's lawful right to vote by providing accessible voting services for eligible voters
- facilitating ballot paper formality
- all electoral processes undertaken in compliance with the Electoral Act
- transparency of process and facilitated access for political participants (candidates, campaigners and scrutineers) in accordance with the Electoral Act

## Good service and positive experience

- provide a positive voter experience at the by-election
- voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information
- staff will be courteous and professional in all their dealings with the public and political participants

## Efficient processes and procedures

- build staff capability and provide a positive experience for AEC staff in delivering the by-election
- integrate planning across all levels of the AEC
- maintain the ability to mobilise and deliver electoral events whenever they are called



# Summary of AEC service standards

The following four election service standards will guide the AEC in delivering the by-election.

## 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 pre-poll 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 pre-poll voting centres and polling places will be accurate.

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

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.

## Standard 2

### **The AEC delivers high-quality service**

#### **Achieved by:**

Applications for enrolment and roll updates received by the close of roll deadline will be processed in time for the by-election.

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

Polling place accessibility ratings will be made available on the [AEC website](#).

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

## Standard 3

### **Votes are counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result**

#### **Achieved by:**

After the close of polling, up-to-date count information will be progressively published on the [AEC website](#).

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

Appointed scrutineers observe electoral processes, including counting of votes, to ensure transparency and integrity in the conduct of the election.

## 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.

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

Voters, political entities and donors are supported to comply with obligations under the Electoral Act through discharging our regulatory obligations in accordance with our [Regulatory Approach](#).

Complaints will be managed in accordance with the [Complaints Management Policy](#).

<sup>1</sup> The AEC will follow the established process to 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. 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.

# Achieving the AEC service standards

## 1 Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information

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

### Communication

The AEC will communicate with eligible voters for the by-election to provide relevant information and encourage participation. This will include some advertising, social media content and outreach to local community organisations in order to:

- provide eligible voters with a final reminder to enrol or change their details on the electoral roll
- provide information about the polling date and places
- ensure voters are aware of their voting options, regardless of whether they are able to get to a polling place on polling day
- support voter participation by reminding voters to vote in the by-election and ensuring voters are advised how to cast a formal vote as instructed on the ballot paper.

Public notice advertisements in newspapers in the relevant state will include information on the issue of the writ, candidate details, polling places and remote voter services.

The AEC has online practise voting tools, which have been developed to explain to voters simply how to make sure their vote will count in all election events. They are interactive with easy-to-follow instructions on how to complete your ballot paper correctly. They are available in 12 languages in addition to English. The tools are supported by easy-to-read guides. These can be accessed at [aec.gov.au/Voting/How\\_to\\_vote/practice/](https://aec.gov.au/Voting/How_to_vote/practice/).

An official guide will be delivered to households, coinciding with the early voting period. The guide will provide information on where and when to vote, what to do if you cannot get to a polling place on polling day, and how to complete your ballot paper correctly. The AEC will translate the official guide into a range of languages and make these available on the [AEC website](#). It will also be published in accessible formats for voters who are blind or have low vision.

The AEC's national telephone number, 13 23 26, will continue to operate during the election period. A telephone interpreter service is available which includes 19 dedicated language lines and a general line for other languages. A candidate list for voters who are blind or have low vision will also be available. The National Relay Service is also available for voters (or any other person) who may need assistance contacting the AEC.

The AEC is committed to the provision of services through a range of channels. Members of the public can find information, ask a question, provide feedback, or make a complaint through several channels including online, by phone, or at an AEC office. The AEC's [online enquiry form](#) will be monitored in real time and any enquiries received via this form will be answered in an efficient and accurate manner.

### Taking nominations

Prospective candidates will be provided with a range of information and services. The AEC website serves as a central information hub, providing [candidate nomination forms](#) (including the qualification checklist), the [Nomination Guide for Candidates](#), and the [Candidates Handbook](#), which all provide guidance on standing for election to the Australian Parliament.

Candidates must nominate at the office of the Divisional Returning Officer, and EFTPOS machines will be available for payment.

## 2 The AEC delivers a high-quality service

The AEC aims to deliver a high-quality service which allows voters to ensure their enrolment is up to date and facilitates voting based on individual circumstances. Australian citizens, aged 18 years of age or older, are required by law to enrol to vote.

### Enrolment services

The electoral roll will close at 8pm local time, seven days after the issue of writ. Voters can **enrol, check their current electoral enrolment, update their enrolment details, or check the progress of their enrolment application online**. Enrolment applications are also available at any AEC office and on the **AEC website**. A full list of AEC offices is available on the **AEC website**.

### Voting on polling day

On polling day, polling places will be open between 8am and 6pm local time. A list of polling places will be available at the **AEC website**. Voters can use the AEC's website to find nearby polling places and check accessibility.

### Early voting services

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 they meet the eligibility requirements listed on the **AEC website**.

Pre-poll voting centre locations will be available on the **AEC website**.

### Postal voting

Voters who are entitled to a postal vote can apply at the **AEC website** which is the preferred method of application or by using a paper application form available at AEC offices.

Postal vote applications must be received by the AEC before 6pm on the Wednesday before polling day.

Voters may also receive paper postal vote applications or a link to an online form from candidates and political parties. It is lawful under the Electoral Act for third parties to distribute postal vote applications, however the AEC receives questions and complaints each election about this practice.

Political parties are exempt from the Privacy Act, and where applications for postal votes are submitted via parties, they may collect, retain and use applicants' data (e.g. to contact electors).

### Mobile polling

AEC mobile polling teams will visit voters who are less able to get to a polling place. Mobile polling will occur at selected locations to deliver voting services catering for people experiencing homelessness, and those living in remote locations, non-remote discrete Indigenous communities, residential aged care facilities, mental health services and hospitals.

Mobile polling teams may also provide a service at Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

Details regarding the locations that mobile polling teams will be visiting will be available at the **AEC website**.

### Voters in remote locations

Remote mobile polling is the AEC's primary method for servicing voters in remote communities. These communities often do not have timely postal services, and an in-person mobile polling service is the most effective way to cast a vote.

Details regarding the locations that remote mobile polling teams may be visiting will be available on the **AEC website**.

### Voting for people who are blind or have low vision and Antarctic voters

Telephone voting is available for people who are blind or have low vision and for voters in the Antarctic (or in transit to or from Antarctica). The service allows voters to register and vote in secret from any location without attending an AEC office or polling place.

The telephone voting service is available 8.30am to 5.30pm local time Monday to Friday during the early voting period and 8am to 6pm local time on polling day.

### Overseas voting

Postal voting will be available to overseas voters, with communications and provisions in place – such as using an international courier to send postal votes overseas and supporting the return of postal votes via express post or international courier service – to maximise the ability to receive and return ballot papers in time.

Voting when overseas is not compulsory. Voters unable to vote should complete and submit an **Overseas Notification Form**.

### Sustainability

The AEC is conscious of our environmental impact and has adopted several initiatives to proactively reduce waste. All AEC cardboard materials have been designed to be lighter, stronger, and easier to be recycled and reused.

Donations form a key part of the AEC's efforts to reduce waste, and where possible useful items, such as first aid kits and stationery will be donated to a range of organisations, charities and schools.

### Diverse and inclusive workforce

The AEC is committed to having a temporary election workforce that reflects the community it serves. The AEC uses a data-driven approach to ensure polling officials with language skills are employed where there are higher numbers of voters with English as a second language and has recruited polling officials with a range of language skills.

The AEC recruits across the community, including working with partners to promote employment opportunities to people who have previously been under-represented in the AEC's temporary workforce, including young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people with disability.



### 3 Votes are counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result

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

#### Count speed expectations

In recent elections, House of Representatives contests are seeing a broader spread of first preference votes and more diverse preference flows, which leads to a longer period of time before a clear or confirmed result is available.

In addition, there have been recent instances of House of Representatives recounts being undertaken with very high numbers of candidate-appointed scrutineers present. More frequent challenges to counting processes and count results have occurred, which may form an ongoing trend.

While the counting process for the AEC remains the same, more patience is required from media, stakeholders and members of the public in these instances. As always, the AEC's process for any count we conduct is guided by the mantra of "right, not rushed".

#### TCP likelihood

Prior to election night, electoral law dictates that the AEC must select two candidates likely to be the final two candidates in the House of Representatives count. This longstanding requirement under s274 of the Electoral Act provides for an indicative preference count to occur – a count between those two candidates only. It is called the two-candidate-preferred count or TCP. For many federal elections throughout the past few decades, the TCP count has provided a quicker indication of who will win an electorate than would otherwise be possible.

However, in recent times it has become increasingly difficult to predict the top two candidates in a contest. As the count begins, if the TCP selection proves incorrect or uncertain, the AEC may temporarily mask those results but will continue counting in the presence of candidate appointed scrutineers. People must then rely on other counts we conduct (first preferences, full distribution of preferences) to find out a result.

At times, the AEC decides to do a three-candidate preferred count – this can be a little faster than not doing any indicative preference count but still takes longer than the standard process.

Many electoral experts are predicting that the by-election will have a wide spread of first preference votes. This may lead to an incorrect TCP selection, and a longer period before people get an indication of a winner. If this eventuates, it does not mean the count has an issue, but rather that it is simply a close and/or complex count.

#### Counting on by-election night

The count of ordinary votes cast at polling places begins at 6pm (local time) on polling night, when polling officials commence counting the ballot papers.

Pre-poll ordinary ballot papers will be sorted into piles for each candidate and for obviously informal votes from 4pm on polling day.

The piles of ballot papers will not be counted before 6pm.

The process will be open to scrutineers; however, they are not allowed to challenge ballot papers until 6pm when counting starts.

Some postal votes will also be counted on polling night to give an indication of the trend.

#### Counting after polling night

Most declaration votes, which include postal votes, are counted in the days and weeks following polling day. This is partly due to transport requirements.

However, counting of these votes also takes longer than the counting of ordinary votes, since the declaration envelopes need to be checked to ensure the votes are entitled to be admitted, and the ballot papers need to be extracted from the envelopes.

The Electoral Act allows declaration votes to be returned up to 13 days after polling day. This means that the result may not be clear, or be able to be formally declared, until at least two weeks after polling day.

## Scrutineers

Candidates are not permitted to observe the counting of votes for elections in which they are standing. Candidates have the right to appoint scrutineers as personal representatives to observe both the voting process and the counting of votes on their behalf.

Scrutineers in an election must not wear or display any badge or emblem of a candidate or political party in a polling place or seek to interfere with, or attempt to influence, a voter.

The [AEC website](#) includes a [Scrutineers Handbook](#) that is available to support the role of scrutineers.

## Reporting the vote count

Election results will be communicated via the AEC's Tally Room from 6pm on polling night. It enables the public, candidates and scrutineers to follow vote counting on polling night and progressive results until the final outcome is declared.

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



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

The Electoral Act prescribes how an 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 upholds the sanctity of the ballot paper in all its forms and at all times.

1 All ballot papers remain 'live' from printing through to statutorily authorised destruction.

2 The security, integrity and accountability of ballot papers must be preserved at all times – including transit and storage by the AEC, contractors, or other third parties.

These two maxims of ballot paper handling must never be breached and must underpin AEC operations, culture and standards.

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

### Ballot paper handling

The AEC has clear and established safeguards in place for the handling of ballot papers by AEC staff, temporary election staff and contractors, which will be demonstrated at the by-election. AEC staff, official visitors and scrutineers are required to wear badges and/or vests at polling places and the counting centre so they can be easily identified.

### Complaints

The AEC is committed to treating complaints seriously, promptly, and in line with the AEC's **Complaints Management Policy**.

Complaints can be lodged using the AEC's **online enquiry form** or by calling the AEC on 13 23 26. Complaints received during the by-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**.

### Disinformation register

The AEC operates a disinformation register for federal electoral events in order to support voters to access fact-based information about electoral processes and help ensure trust in the by-election.

### Respectful polling environment

The AEC is committed to doing everything we can to foster a voting environment that is safe and welcoming for voters, AEC temporary staff and candidates, campaigners and scrutineers.

Elections are hotly contested and the environment during campaigning or near voting venues can be challenging for some people.

While the Electoral Act limits the AEC's legislative powers inside the polling place and within six metres of the entrance, all political participants should engage with voters and AEC staff in a respectful manner. The AEC works with local police as required.

## Regulatory role

The AEC is responsible for supporting political party registrations, providing guidance on the authorisation of election materials, facilitating transparency through the funding and disclosure scheme, and enforcing Australia's compulsory voting requirement.

To perform our regulatory functions, we:

- act impartially and apply procedural fairness
- provide education and guidance on the regulatory requirements in the Electoral Act
- detect and investigate potential non-compliance with the Electoral Act

We will take regulatory action for non-compliance where necessary and appropriate in line with our **Regulatory Approach**.

## Further information

For more information visit the [AEC website](#) or call 13 23 26.



[aec.gov.au](http://aec.gov.au)

