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About the AEC

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The AEC is an independent statutory authority responsible for administering the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) and the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* (Referendum Act).

### Role

The AEC's role is to deliver the franchise: an Australian citizen's right to vote. The AEC conducts federal elections and referendums and maintains the Commonwealth electoral roll.

### Functions

- Maintain enrolments and the electoral roll
- Manage federal elections and referendums
- Conduct ballots for industrial and commercial organisations
- Conduct public awareness and education activities
- Undertake electoral research
- Assist with overseas elections and referendums
- Administer election funding, financial disclosure and party registration
- Support electoral redistributions

### Values

The AEC embraces the Australian Public Service ICARE values – impartial, committed to service, accountable, respectful and ethical. The AEC applies these values by:

- conducting AEC business with fairness and impartiality
- maintaining high standards of integrity and ethical behaviour
- respecting and upholding the law
- respecting one another, tolerating difference and being sensitive to special needs
- being open, transparent and accountable
- respecting and listening to clients, stakeholders and each other.

### Principles

- We uphold the sanctity of the ballot paper in all its forms and at all times.
- We act to serve the Australian people and the federal parliament.
- We strive for excellence.
- We never knowingly mislead anyone.

# Office network

The AEC has a three-tier structure:

- a national office in Canberra
- state and territory offices
- divisional offices (single offices and combined larger work units).

## National office

At 30 June 2014, nine branches were located in the national office:

- Education and Communication
- Elections
- Finance and Business Services
- Funding and Disclosure
- Information Technology
- Legal and Compliance
- People Services
- Roll Management
- Strategic Capability.

## State offices

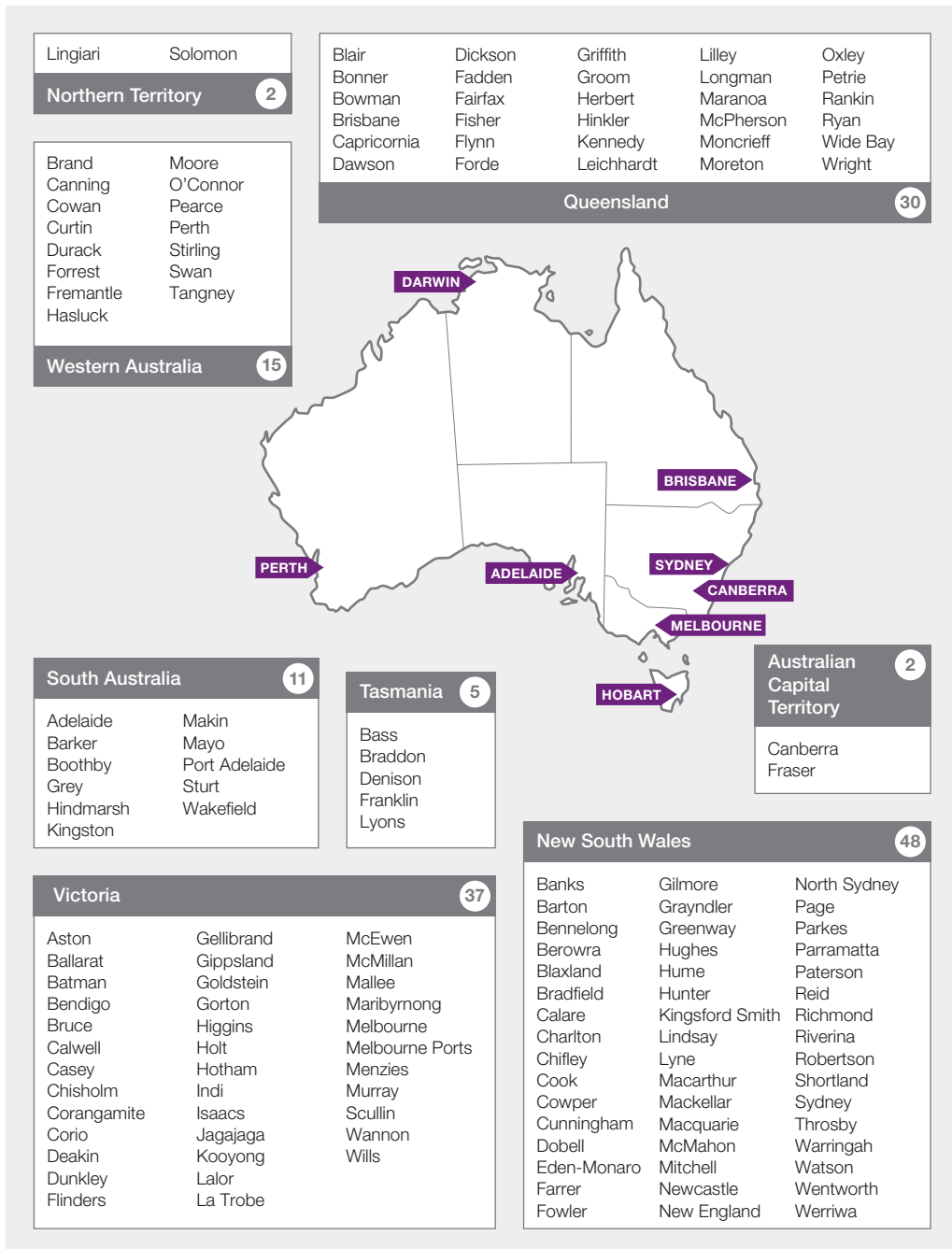
State offices are located in each state capital. The Northern Territory office is in Darwin. The Australian Capital Territory office is managed by the New South Wales state manager except during election periods, when an Australian Electoral Officer for the ACT is appointed.

## Divisional offices

Divisional offices are responsible for electoral administration within each electoral division. There are 150 electoral divisions in Australia and each division is represented by a member of the House of Representatives. Divisional offices administer the conduct of elections, manage the electoral roll and carry out public awareness activities. Some divisional offices stand alone, while others are colocated in larger work units. [Figure 1](#) shows Australia's electoral divisions.



Figure 1: Electoral divisions





AEC Executive Management Group 2013-14

## Leadership

The AEC is managed by a three-person Australian Electoral Commission. The commission is headed by a chairperson, who must be an active or retired judge of the Federal Court of Australia. The other members are the Electoral Commissioner and a non-judicial member.

The current members of the commission are:

- the Hon Peter Heerey AM QC, Chairperson
- Mr Tom Rogers, Electoral Commissioner (Acting)
- non-judicial member – vacant.

## Executive management

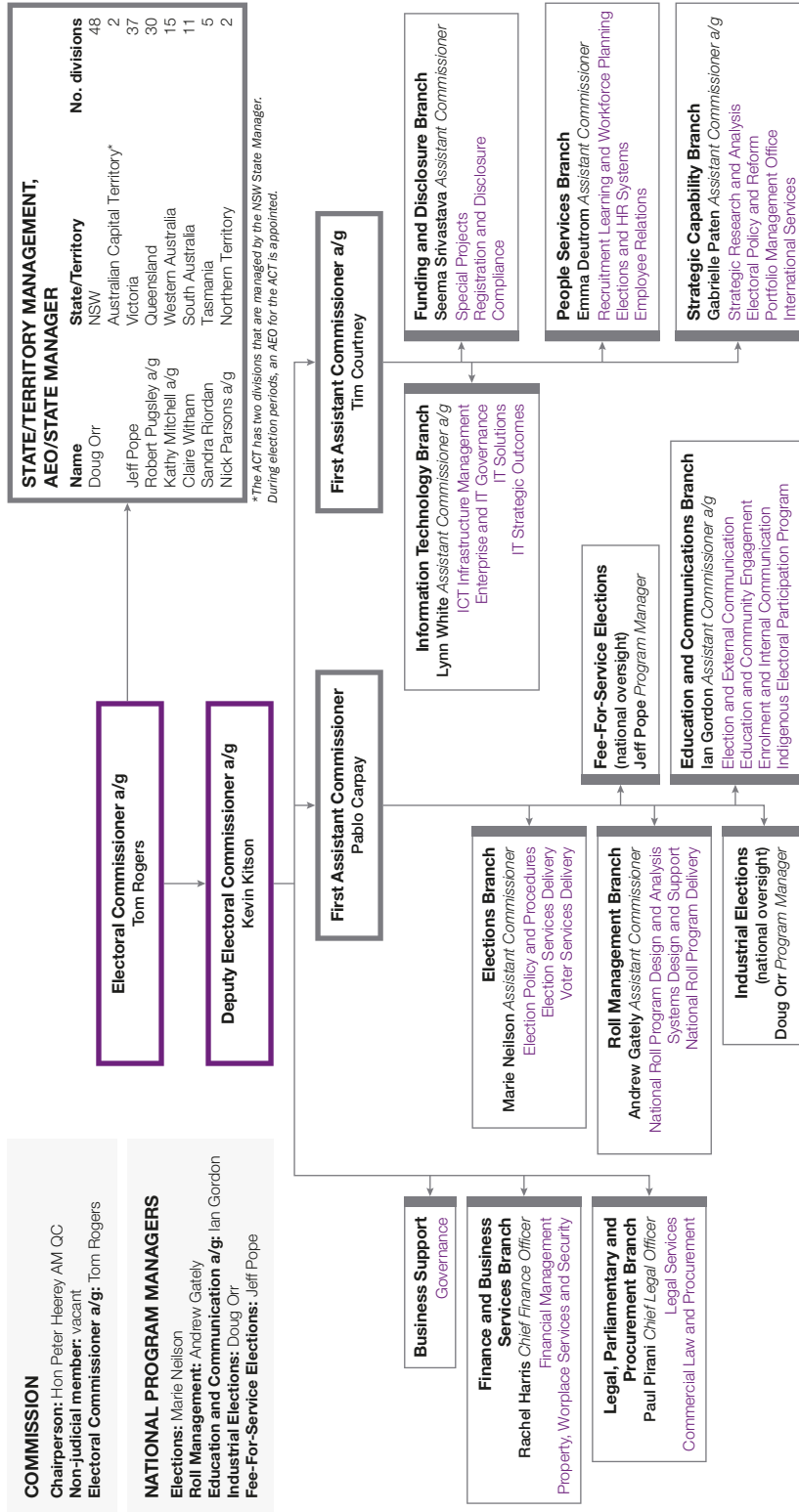
The Electoral Commissioner is responsible for management and strategic leadership of the AEC. Assisting the Electoral Commissioner are the Deputy Electoral Commissioner, two first assistant commissioners, six assistant commissioners, the Chief Finance Officer and the Chief Legal Officer.

State managers, who hold the statutory appointment of Australian Electoral Officer, are responsible for electoral activities within their state or territory. Three assistant commissioners and two state managers are also national programme managers:

- The Assistant Commissioner, Roll Management branch, has national programme responsibility for electoral enrolment.
- The Assistant Commissioner, Elections branch, has national programme responsibility for federal parliamentary and Torres Strait Regional Authority elections.
- The Assistant Commissioner, Education and Communication branch, has national programme responsibility for public awareness, information and education programmes.
- The New South Wales State Manager has national programme responsibility for industrial elections and protected action ballots.
- The Victorian State Manager has national programme responsibility for fee-for-service elections.

Figure 2 shows the AEC organisation chart and leadership structure as at 30 June 2014.

Figure 2: Organisation chart and leadership structure at 30 June 2014



# Legislation

The Electoral Act recognises the AEC as an independent agency. The legislation that underpins the AEC's business processes, purpose, values and leadership is shown in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1: Legislative framework**

Legislative instrument	AEC function
<i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005</i>	Conduct Torres Strait Regional Authority elections
<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>	Conduct federal elections
	Maintain and update the Commonwealth electoral roll
	Promote public awareness of electoral and parliamentary matters through information and education programmes
	Provide international electoral assistance in cases approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs
	Conduct and promote research into electoral matters and other matters that relate to AEC functions
	Register political parties
	Pay public funding to election candidates and parties and publish financial disclosure returns of political parties and others
<i>Electoral and Referendum Regulations 1940</i>	Determine representation entitlements (redistributions)
	Conduct federal elections and referendums and provide voter information
<i>Fair Work Act 2009</i>	Conduct protected action ballots
<i>Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009</i>	Conduct industrial elections
<i>Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997</i>	Manage public money and property
<i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i>	Hold and release documents
<i>Privacy Act 1988</i>	Store, use and disclose personal information
<i>Public Service Act 1999</i>	Ensure the effective and fair employment, management and leadership of AEC employees
<i>Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984</i>	Conduct federal referendums
<i>Representation Act 1983</i>	Set numbers for Senate elections

## Outcome and programmes

The AEC has one 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 programmes.*

Three programmes outlined in the Portfolio Budget Statements 2013–14 meet this outcome:

**Programme 1.1** Electoral Roll Management

**Programme 1.2** Election Management and Support Services

**Programme 1.3** Education and Communication.

### Programme 1.1 Electoral Roll Management

Objective: Voter entitlement for Australians and support for electoral events and redistributions through maintaining an accurate and up-to-date electoral roll.

To do this the AEC delivers:

- **Electoral roll management:** The AEC maintains multiple streams of contact with voters to encourage them to enrol and keep their enrolment up to date.
- **Support services for electoral redistributions:** The AEC provides support for the redistribution process and provides updated electoral boundary redistribution maps and advice to voters in redistributed divisions.

### Programme 1.2 Election Management and Support Services

Objective: Access to an impartial and independent electoral system through the provision of election services, assistance and advice.

To do this the AEC delivers:

- **Federal elections, by-elections and referendums:** The AEC provides products and services to support the conduct of a federal election or referendum.
- **Party registrations:** The AEC maintains the Register of Political Parties as required by the Electoral Act and assists people applying for party registration.
- **Funding and disclosure services:** The AEC ensures transparency and accountability in political funding and expenditure by participants in the political process at the federal level. It maintains products to help people meet reporting obligations to lodge accurate and timely returns in accordance with the requirements of the Electoral Act.



- **Industrial elections and protected action ballots:** The AEC conducts timely and transparent industrial elections in accordance with the requirements of the *Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009* and each organisation's rules. The AEC conducts protected action ballots in accordance with the *Fair Work Act 2009* and Fair Work Australia orders.
- **Torres Strait Regional Authority elections:** The AEC delivers products and services to support the conduct of Torres Strait Regional Authority elections, conducted in line with the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005*.
- **Fee-for-service elections:** The AEC delivers elections and ballots for authorities and organisations on a full cost recovery basis in accordance with the AEC's minimum standards. The AEC also assists with the conduct of state, territory and local government elections where requested by the relevant electoral body.
- **Advice and assistance in overseas elections:** The AEC provides advice and assistance in matters relating to elections and referendums to authorities of foreign countries or to foreign organisations in cases approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

### Programme 1.3 Education and Communication

Objective: Informed Australians through the provision of information services on electoral matters.

To do this the AEC delivers:

- **Electoral education:** The AEC provides electoral education through a variety of programmes and services, including online technology. The AEC also delivers high-quality civics education in collaboration with other government and non-government agencies.
- **Communication strategies and services:** The AEC delivers public awareness and communication strategies to support the conduct of federal elections and referendums. It makes use of contemporary technology to deliver modern products and services in line with community preferences for online services.
- **Community strategies:** The AEC provides education and assistance to a range of audiences – in particular, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the Indigenous Electoral Participation Programme.

### Key performance results

The 2013–14 report on performance which follows describes performance results for each of the AEC's three programmes, including key performance indicators and outcomes over three years.

When the Division of Griffith by-election was announced in January 2014, AEC staff in Queensland needed to move quickly to update election procedures and implement recommendations made in the report by Mr Mick Keelty AO, *Inquiry into the 2013 WA Senate Election* (Keelty Report). Ensuring the changes were understood, supported and fully adopted was vital and would require ongoing communication, dialogue and teamwork.

## Delivering reform at the Griffith by-election

The Griffith by-election was the first parliamentary election since the loss of Senate ballot papers in Western Australia and release of the Keelty Report just one month earlier, on 6 December 2013. With election day set for Saturday 8 February, divisional staff prepared for their first meeting with the Keelty Implementation Taskforce (KIT) in January 2014.

Divisional Returning Officer Karen Burnes went to the meeting with lots of questions: 'We were all wondering what new procedures would we need to implement? How much time would we have? How would we do it?'

At the meeting KIT talked through the proposed changes and their implications for election practices and procedures. 'It was great to be part of an open dialogue between those of us delivering the by-election on the ground and KIT who were operational people, familiar with the challenges of running elections', Karen said. 'Nothing that they presented fazed us – it was all manageable, all common sense, and all designed to ensure the security of ballot papers and the integrity of the election.'

Following the meeting, Karen and others who'd attended scheduled time to talk to the rest of the Griffith team about the changes, which included overarching ballot paper principles, strengthened ballot secure zones and new forms and procedures to manage the arrival and despatch of ballot papers.

Communication was key, Karen noted. 'In the dynamic election environment it was critical that everyone was kept informed on a daily basis', she said. In addition to regular communication between staff, training materials were also updated. 'Everyone involved, no matter what their role, needed to understand the new measures and ensure the security of ballot papers at all times', Karen said.

The by-election was conducted under unprecedented scrutiny – evident during the Declaration of Nominations on Friday 17 January, which was attended by eight media crews, numerous candidates and a large number of AEC staff from the Queensland and national offices.

In the end, Karen noted, the investment in communication, dialogue and ongoing support for staff paid off. ‘I had absolute confidence that all staff had been given clear and adequate instruction about the new procedures and that support was always available from KIT, our state management team and colleagues from all parts of the AEC.’

Karen also described how the benefits of the new approach became clear when staff began the process of accounting for ballot papers at the end of the by-election following the Distribution of Preferences. ‘Our ballot paper reconciliation was easy thanks to clear information about ballot paper custody and transfer at every step of the process’, she said.

‘As the Divisional Returning Officer, I certainly felt very much in control of what was happening. All matters that we covered off were about a more rigorous approach to the handling and custody of ballot papers and it all translated into a higher level of control, better management of all election activities and better services to voters.’

