



A taskforce for change

On 16 December 2013, a cross-section of experienced AEC divisional, state and national office staff gathered at the AEC's Victorian state office. It was the first meeting of the newly appointed Keelty Implementation Taskforce (KIT), and their task was to implement the recommendations made by Mr Mick Keelty AO in his report *Inquiry into the 2013 WA Senate election*.

Ten days earlier, on 6 December, the three-person Australian Electoral Commission had accepted all 32 of Mr Keelty's recommendations. Now, in the context of a looming by-election in the Queensland Division of Griffith and a possible fresh Senate election in Western Australia, a practical step-by-step plan was required to prioritise reforms and ensure the quality and effectiveness of any new measures introduced.

The team first developed a process map illustrating the life cycle of the ballot paper and identified points in the cycle that posed risks to ballot security. They then made a list of possible solutions in the form of products, policy ideas and tracking forms. In this way, the 'folio of interim measures' was born.

At their second meeting in the new year, KIT worked quickly to finalise a number of new measures. These included:

- dissemination of ballot paper principles for display in all AEC offices to visually reinforce the importance of ballot paper security
- updated ballot paper security and related information in revised election procedures manuals and training materials for polling officials
- preparation of secure ballot paper storage areas in the Brisbane office in time for the arrival of by-election ballot papers
- development of tamper-evident labels
- a 'folio of interim measures' for the Griffith by-election, comprising new forms, new packaging labels, new policy and guidance documents and a job profile for the new role of Divisional Materials Manager.



Griffith by-election

The Griffith by-election was announced in January 2014. Once the proposed new measures were approved, KIT members travelled to Brisbane and met with the Queensland state management team and Griffith divisional staff. This was an opportunity to discuss the new measures, gather views and feedback and make further changes and improvements.

Queensland staff fully embraced the proposals, suggested improvements and in some cases went above and beyond KIT requirements. The result was a more rigorous risk management approach to the handling and custody of ballot papers and a more transparent outcome for voters and stakeholders.

2014 Western Australian Senate election

On 20 February 2014, three days after the declaration of results in Griffith, the Court of Disputed Returns declared the 2013 Western Australian Senate election void. KIT members had already travelled to Western Australia a number of times to brief state colleagues and these discussions led to an updated 'folio of interim measures' for the WA Senate election.

This election posed a number of fresh challenges – not least being the logistical challenges of vast distances across Western Australia. To support local staff, KIT members and AEC officers from across Australia maintained an active presence – both in Perth and outlying divisions – throughout the election. Once again, local staff worked with KIT to implement the new measures, identify issues and suggest improvements.

The return of the Western Australian Senate writ on 1 May 2014 and the safe arrival of all ballot papers at the AEC's Perth warehouse, marked the conclusion of an election which had seen vast improvements in ballot paper security and tracking, material segregation and control, and a greater level of accountability and transparency across all AEC procedures.

Reform Team

Following the Griffith and WA Senate elections, KIT embarked on a detailed evaluation of all new measures to ensure their scalability, practicality and affordability across all AEC offices in a federal election.

On 1 August 2014, KIT became the Reform Team and was given a new long-term home in the Elections Branch. The new team's role is to work closely with key stakeholders and AEC staff throughout Australia to implement all 32 Keelty Report recommendations, as well as recommendations from other internal and external reviews. This ongoing reform programme seeks to ensure that the principles of quality, integrity and consistency are embedded and evident in all AEC operations.

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.’



Eight days, six hundred thousand enrolments

A federal election represents the peak of AEC operational workload following a three-year cycle of planning and preparation. One significant milestone is the close of rolls – the deadline for eligible Australians to enrol or update their enrolment before the election.

The federal electoral roll closes at 8pm local Australian time on the seventh calendar day after the issue of writs for an election. This deadline is designed to give voters enough time to ensure they are enrolled correctly, and the AEC enough time to process enrolments and prepare the roll for production as the certified list – the official record used for voter mark-off on election day.

Historically, an election announcement is a catalyst for voters to either enrol for the first time or update their enrolment details and the 2013 federal election was no different. Hundreds of thousands of enrolments and enrolment updates were received through the AEC's online enrolment service, by email, by post or fax, or by hand delivery. All had to be checked, entered and rechecked to ensure that details were complete, fully verified and captured correctly in the AEC's enrolment systems.

Along with other state and territory offices, the AEC's New South Wales office commenced planning for the 2013 close of rolls almost immediately after the 2010 election. James Carroll, Assistant Director of Roll Management for NSW, noted that, due to population growth, every federal election close of rolls is larger than the one before. 'The secret to successfully managing ever larger workloads is early planning, flexible systems and teamwork', James explained. 'It was vital to prepare early and give staff confidence that capacity and contingencies were in place to manage the increased workload according to the election timetable without compromising roll accuracy and integrity.'

A key feature of the NSW plan was the creation of a central processing team located in Haymarket, Sydney, supported by smaller teams in Parramatta and the Australian Capital Territory. 'These teams took over the work of processing paper enrolment forms', James said. 'This allowed NSW divisional offices to focus on online enrolments, roll integrity and quality assurance processes.'



AEC systems technology was critical to overall management of the workload. In the lead-up to the election, the AEC invested in building system capacity and enhancing system performance to ensure that it could meet peak demand. 'The investment really paid off', James said. 'The NSW state management team was able to monitor systems and the capacity of divisional offices and then reallocate processing tasks whenever we needed to even out workloads across the state.'

Staff began processing data shortly after the issue of the writ on 5 August 2013 and continued to receive enrolments until the deadline on 8pm on Monday, 12 August. During this period around a total of 203 000 enrolment transactions were processed across NSW and the ACT. One-third of these, around 70 000 enrolments, were received in the last two days alone. All were successfully processed to deadline thanks to some 350 staff working in shifts over 36 hours. Across Australia the AEC processed a total of 627 256 enrolments. As predicted, it was the largest close of rolls of any federal election.

A new role to deliver reform: Divisional Materials Managers at the 2014 Western Australian Senate election



The 2014 Western Australian Senate election was conducted under unprecedented scrutiny. The AEC needed to demonstrate that it had new, improved procedures in place to ensure the security of ballot papers, the quality of election services and the integrity of the election outcome. The new role of Divisional Materials Manager (DMM) would be central to achieving these goals.

The role of DMM was first introduced at the 2014 Griffith by-election. Given the larger scale of the WA Senate election, the role was enhanced and experienced temporary staff were appointed as DMMs for each WA electoral division.

DMMs were responsible for the movement, packaging, storage, and security of all of their division's election materials and for maintaining a detailed materials management log. They worked primarily at outposted centres – premises hired for a range of large-scale election tasks. In Perth, outposted centres housed several divisions and DMMs at these sites reported to a supervisor who oversaw material management for the whole centre.

Louise Foppoli was appointed the DMM supervisor at the Northern Scrutiny Centre and was responsible for supervising DMMs for three divisions – Cowan, Moore and Pearce. 'All the positions were new, which meant that, regardless of our election experience, we had a lot to learn', Louise said.

For nearly three weeks before the election, DMMs were responsible for organising materials for the officers in charge of each polling place, including ballot papers, certified lists and sundry election materials. 'We organised ballot paper secure zones in allocated areas within the scrutiny centre and monitored them daily so that movement of ballot papers was controlled and fully accounted for at all times', Louise said.

After election day, the DMMs had to ensure all ballot papers from each polling place as well as declaration votes were accounted for and could continue to be accounted for at each phase of the subsequent scrutines. They also worked closely with their respective Divisional Returning Officers to ensure that the ballot papers and results tallied for each division.

'The first few days after the election were definitely the most challenging', Louise said. 'There was pressure to count votes as quickly as possible, but we could not compromise on the methodical accounting and packaging procedures to be followed. I was impressed with the dedication of everyone involved and the efforts they went to so that every ballot paper could be accounted for at every step in the process.'

Louise believes that trialling the new roles and procedures at state level was a vital step in the AEC's reform process. 'I'm really confident my team did a great job – not just because we achieved the needed outcome but also because we added value along the way. We saw the intent of the changes straight away but sometimes minor adjustments to forms and processes were needed for the new procedures to work effectively on the ground', she said.

'I'm sure the things we learned will help other AEC staff and ensure that full rollout at the next federal election is successful.'

It's an early start – so early that only a faint light on the horizon breaks the darkness. But the team from Darwin has already been up for some time, preparing for their day of remote polling in Warruwi – a remote Northern Territory Aboriginal community on South Goulburn Island.



Going to great lengths to deliver the franchise

Warruwi, with around 220 enrolled voters, is just one of many Indigenous communities spread over 1.3 million square kilometres in the Division of Lingiari that received mobile polling services during the 2013 federal election.

Almost all of the voters in Lingiari live in remote areas, and one in every three lives in a remote Indigenous community. Service delivery in these areas can be particularly challenging. For many of these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voters English is their second, or even third, language and electoral processes are unfamiliar and challenging. Nevertheless, they are keen to have their say.

To make it easier, the AEC implemented significant improvements to electoral services for remote voters during the 2013 election. Schedules were extended to allow communities with more than 200 enrolled voters to receive at least one full day of polling. Larger communities received up to five days of polling. The extended services were publicised widely on regional television and radio and promoted locally through Australian Government agencies and community organisations.

Partnership was key. The AEC worked in collaboration with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to maintain efficiency while extending the reach of services and to ensure they were both professional and culturally appropriate. Each AEC mobile polling team included two experienced DHS staff who work regularly in the communities and are known and well regarded. They were accompanied by an experienced AEC polling official. Most teams had at least one Indigenous member. The teams travelled to communities by air and in DHS vehicles, supported by DHS logistical staff in Darwin and Alice Springs and following DHS remote travel safety protocols.

At their destinations, teams used the AEC's new electronic certified lists to search quickly for voter names and improve the movement of voters through each polling location. A series of 12 Indigenous in-language DVDs and one easy-English version were also screened at various locations on TVs or tablets. The videos showed voters how to cast a formal vote and 89 per cent of viewers said they found them helpful.

Mobile polling teams were also supported by AEC voter information officers (VIOs) – a new position established for the 2013 federal election. VIOs were local Indigenous community members trained by the AEC to help voters to understand how to cast a formal vote. Throughout the election VIOs worked in 44 remote communities across the Northern Territory.

Overall, remote polling teams for the 2013 federal election took 27 per cent more votes than in 2010. The AEC's partnership with DHS proved to be a critical factor in improving services to remote communities, as was support received from the Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Northern Territory Shires and the many organisations and individuals who work regularly in these remote areas.

Making a difference at the National Indigenous Youth Parliament

Arrin Hazelbane is a young Warai man with family connections to the west coast of South Australia and the Finnis River region of the Northern Territory. Arrin is currently studying law at the University of Adelaide. His aim is to pursue a career in politics, with aspirations to give back to his community and help other Indigenous people to break down barriers.

Ineke Wallis is from the East Arnhem region and is currently working as a governance and executive administration officer for the East Arnhem Regional Council in Nhulunbuy. As someone who speaks her mind, Ineke provides a vital link between the council and community representatives and she aspires to become an elected representative of her people.

Ineke and Arrin were among 50 young Indigenous leaders, aged 16–25, who took part in the second National Indigenous Youth Parliament. Once again, the youth parliament was a collaboration between the AEC, the YMCA and the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House.

The youth parliament programme included a visit to Parliament House to observe question time and meet and learn from members and senators. Arrin spoke at length to his South Australian representatives, Mark Butler MP, Senator Anne Ruston and Senator Penny Wright. Ineke received first-hand advice from Northern Territory Senator Nova Peris, the Hon Warren Snowdon MP and Natasha Griggs MP.

Participants also talked informally with political leaders such as the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion; the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Bill Shorten MP; the Chair of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, Mr Warren Mundine; and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP – who attended as the representative of the Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson. Many of the politicians who met and spoke with the youth parliamentarians later noted that the experience had reinvigorated their own enthusiasm and idealism.

Participants also attended a reception at Government House with His Excellency General the Hon Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) and visited the Embassy of the United States to meet the US Ambassador to Australia, John Berry.

The 2014 National Indigenous Youth Parliament, held in May 2014, was an opportunity for young Indigenous Australians to experience Australia's electoral and parliamentary system first-hand. For Ineke Wallis and Arrin Hazelbane, the youth parliament was another important step towards a career in public life.



Ineke Wallis (left) and Arrin Hazelbane (right) at the 2014 National Indigenous Youth Parliament.

On Saturday, 31 May 2014 the participants arrived at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House for the official opening of the two-day simulated parliament.

The symbolism was very powerful as Arrin and Ineke took their place alongside the other future Indigenous leaders in the chamber where, in 1962, legislation giving Indigenous people the right to enrol and vote in federal elections had been debated more than 50 years earlier.

Arrin passionately debated the Indigenous Juvenile Justice and Alternative Sentencing Youth Bill 2014. Ineke debated the Indigenous Retirement Age and Access to Superannuation Youth Bill 2014. Their desire, and that of all the participants, to effect change and give a voice to Indigenous people was evident throughout the week.

'[The National Indigenous Youth Parliament] enabled me to understand the importance of voting and not to underestimate each individual's democratic rights', said Arrin. 'I am now a part of a collective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth voice. We are the voice of the future.'

'It's important for our mob to get educated and close the gap, as this is the only way for our people to have a brighter future', Ineke said. 'Being with so many great inspirational young Indigenous people made me see we can do it if we stick together.'





It was the introduction of computerised election results in 1974 that marked the first, albeit tiny, step in a long path that ultimately led to the tally room's demise. As technology became more sophisticated, media still gathered in the tally room on election night, but they now relied on the AEC's computer system for results rather than the tally board. Finally the advent of the Internet allowed the AEC to provide results directly to anyone with a computer and a web connection, regardless of their location.

Though it was no longer relevant to collating and relaying results, for some time the tally room continued to serve as a focal point for media coverage of federal elections. In 2013, however, all major media outlets announced they would not be attending the tally room on election night. With no media presence, the AEC could no longer justify the \$1.2 million staging costs and announced that the National Tally Room would be retired.

Though the colour and the movement of the tally room is gone, its role of providing centrally coordinated official election results lives on through the AEC's [Virtual Tally Room](#), available from the AEC website. In 2013, the Virtual Tally Room became live just before 6pm AEDT on election day and delivered uninterrupted, real-time election information and results throughout election night and the days that followed. The Virtual Tally Room received approximately 200 000 visitors on election night and information from the tally room was used extensively by media organisations to analyse and present election results from media studios around the country.

In recognition of the role played by the National Tally Room, the AEC donated the historic tally board to the Museum of Australian Democracy so that future generations will be able appreciate a little of the colour and flavour of what was once an iconic institution in Australia's electoral history.

'Challenges in a controlled environment allowed me to test capability outside my comfort zone. This allowed consolidated learning... helped me to connect the dots.'

Course participant

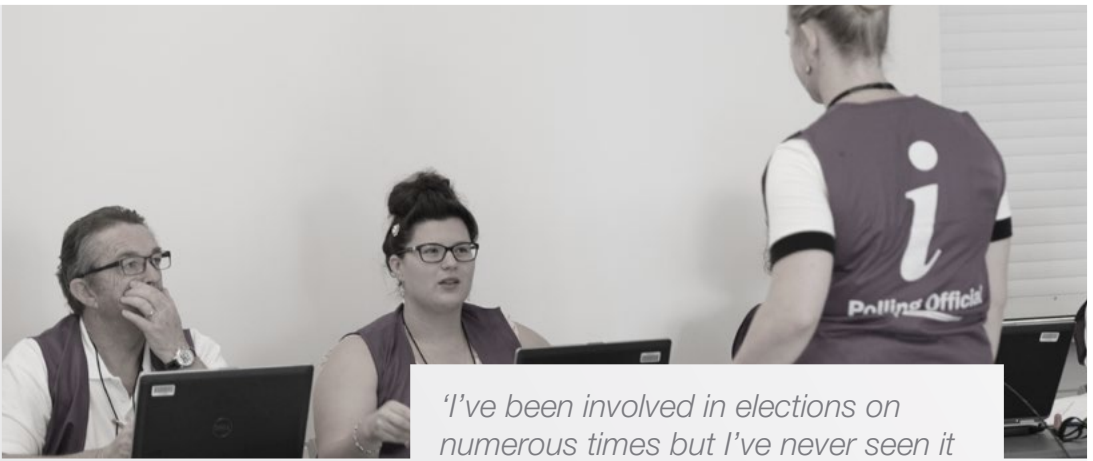
A new approach to training

Divisional Returning Officers (DROs) are responsible for the House of Representatives election in each of Australia's 150 federal electoral divisions. They must oversee the delivery of all election services in their division including enrolment processing, early voting, employing and training polling workers the conduct of the count, and finalising records and returns. All these services must be delivered consistently, to a high standard, in accordance with the Electoral Act, following a mandated timeline and under constant scrutiny. But what if you've never done it before?

In recent years, the AEC has sought out new approaches to election training that go beyond merely informing staff about procedures and requirements to preparing them for the unique and dynamic characteristics of an election. Effective election management is not just about knowing what to do; it's about being able to do it under pressure and deal with the myriad of unexpected issues that can arise along the way.

The need for experiential election training was heightened in the New South Wales state office when workforce planning revealed a significant number of staff would be eligible for retirement before the 2013 federal election. This meant that a considerable proportion of the state's DROs would be either new to the AEC or new to their role when the election took place.

To build election capability, a pilot election training programme was developed – the Election Ready Operational Capacity Development Programme. The programme covered all



'I've been involved in elections on numerous times but I've never seen it in this light as a whole and how much the DRO needs to be on top of.'

Course participant

aspects of election operations, with particular emphasis on the post-election period. The programme highlighted the fact that post-election success is dependent on completing pre-election activities to a high quality.

The programme incorporated simulated election activities that participants were asked to manage. These were scaled to provide as close to a 'real' election experience as possible. Tight and demanding election timeframes were mimicked through unfolding scenarios, with disruptions occurring throughout key processes, requiring participants to react and respond appropriately.

For example, in order for participants to gain an understanding of the practical variations that can occur during counting, fresh scrutines of 75 000 House of Representatives ballot papers were conducted simultaneously for two divisions – one with 11 candidates and the other with four. One of the divisions was simulated as a close seat and actors played the role of scrutineers. The 'scrutineers' followed real scenarios from previous elections to challenge ballot papers and supervisor decisions. Counts involving 3 000 declaration votes were also conducted in a tight timeframe, with other staff role-playing candidates, scrutineers, media and AEC returning officers – all applying pressure for a result.

The nine-day programme was initially piloted in New South Wales in October 2012. Peer and facilitator feedback was provided to the participants at the conclusion of each practical activity. Critical areas of focus were compliance and adherence to policy and procedural instructions, but participants were also encouraged to reflect on their learning and identify new insights.

Feedback from the pilot was overwhelmingly positive and three more courses were conducted, providing training to 80 AEC managers and supervisors from New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

The success of the programme in delivering 'the closest experience of running an election outside running an election' means it is now being assessed for inclusion in the AEC's new Learning and Development Framework – part of a long-term commitment to meaningful and comprehensive training that supports staff to deliver quality election services.