



SECTION 1

YEAR IN REVIEW

The AEC transitioned from one electoral cycle to the next and made some significant advances to improve the voter experience.



**LARGEST
—EVER—
FEDERAL ELECTION**

95%
**ENROLMENT RATE
SUSTAINED**

**FOCUS ON
CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT**

In this section

- 2** Commissioner's review
- 6** AEC highlights 2016–17

Commissioner's review



2016–17 was a busy and productive year for the AEC, defined by the delivery of a successful double dissolution election and the largest ever agency evaluation of electoral operations aimed at improving the voter experience.

While the polls closed just two days into the reporting year, the intensity remained as the AEC moved quickly to capture valuable information from the election, and to drive further operational improvements in an increasingly complex environment.

The 2016 election was the largest in the nation's history, continuing a trend that has placed increased pressure on the agency's limited resources. At the same time, it underscored the community's expectations for high-quality electoral services, fast and accurate results, and world-class electoral integrity.

To deepen our understanding of what worked, what could be improved and the emerging challenges, the AEC embarked on its most comprehensive election evaluation ever, placing every aspect of its 2016 electoral experience under the microscope.

After detailed analysis, the AEC identified critical new work priorities to help improve operations for future federal elections.

It has been a dynamic time for our organisation; transitioning from one electoral cycle to the next and taking an important new turn in our 'change journey' towards greater modernisation and continuous agency improvement.

The 2016 federal election

The double dissolution election held on Saturday 2 July 2016 was the largest, most scrutinised and complex election ever conducted by the AEC.

There were 15.6 million people enrolled to vote, which saw the AEC exceed its target of more than 95 per cent of eligible Australians enrolled; and almost 75,000 temporary election staff employed to help deliver the event. Record numbers of political parties and candidates registered to participate.

The election was delivered in difficult and challenging circumstances. The Senate voting reforms to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, were the biggest change to the voting system in 30 years. To implement that change, the AEC adopted new technologies and modified electoral systems and processes just three months out from the event. This included a new end-to-end solution to count and distribute Senate preferences, using scanning and image recognition technology.

The election was successfully delivered despite some initial issues on polling day in relation to the supply of ballot papers in a small number of polling stations, and longer than usual queues in some places.

It demonstrated the strong commitment from AEC staff to deliver a federal election, as well as the importance of systems and process enhancements arising from the Keelty and Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) reviews after the previous election. The AEC has now addressed all of the Keelty and ANAO recommendations – a significant milestone for the agency.

In addition, the election highlighted the need for further improvements to keep pace with community expectations and ensure the electoral system can deliver high-quality and high-integrity elections in the future.

Election evaluation

To determine the way forward, the AEC convened a formal evaluation team in August 2016 to review all aspects of the election and recommend operational enhancements for the agency.

In December, the team reported eight key lessons learned in areas such as planning, information management and communication practices, resourcing, training and recruitment.

In response to the evaluation, the AEC identified 13 cross-agency work priorities to be implemented by the AEC in time for the next election.

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

As part of the evaluation of the 2016 federal election, the agency appeared before the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters on several occasions. It also made numerous submissions to its inquiry into the 2016 federal election.

The 'Your vote will help shape Australia' paper people campaign for the 2016 federal election



In its third interim report delivered in June 2017, the Committee commended the AEC for its willingness to adopt the Keely reforms and our proactive efforts to identify ways of transforming our culture and processes. The Committee found the current model for conducting elections, including legacy IT systems and the recruitment and training of temporary election officials, is at the end of its useful life.

The Committee noted that, while the AEC has done its best to innovate within its current significant legislative and resource constraints, further meaningful innovation and modernisation are unlikely without legislative reform and significant investment.

The Committee recommended the Australian Government consider additional funding for the AEC. This would allow for further automation, IT upgrades and system replacements, new employment models for recruiting and training the election workforce, as well as ongoing legislative reforms to address unnecessary prescriptions and other technical issues within the Electoral Act.

Maintaining confidence

Despite these challenges, the AEC recorded some significant achievements throughout 2016–17. The enrolment rate was sustained above 95 per cent for 12 months, online enrolments surged and the divergence between the federal and state electoral rolls was significantly reduced. We also conducted three electoral redistributions and important work was done to boost the Indigenous participation rate in electoral activity. The AEC also continued to build strategic partnerships and assist overseas electoral administration bodies in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Myanmar and Fiji.

The agency operated within its allocated budget, with improved business practices and information technology efficiencies assisting the AEC's overall financial position.

Recent research¹ shows confidence in the administration of our electoral processes remains high. The AEC is keen to maintain this confidence by working with government on solutions that will enable Australians to enjoy a modern, secure and fit-for-purpose electoral system in the future.

2018 and beyond

While much of the focus in 2016–17 was at a strategic level, operationally the AEC also worked hard to prepare for the successful delivery of the next federal election.

In the coming year, the agency will move into the mobilisation phase of its election readiness framework, testing systems and processes, as well as equipping staff to deliver an election as soon as it is called. In addition, there will be a longer-term focus on our organisational design and sustainable employment models, as well as ongoing modernisation and security of our systems.

It will also be an exciting time as we prepare to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* late in the year, and explore the vast range of opportunities to build on our reputation as one of the world's best electoral administration bodies.

1 Norris P & Gromping M: Electoral Integrity Project report, *Populist Threats to Electoral Integrity: The Year in Elections, 2016-17*. Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series. <https://www.hks.harvard.edu>



National Indigenous youth parliamentarians visit Parliament House in Canberra

SPOTLIGHT

Prime Minister opens National Indigenous Youth Parliament

The Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, led celebrations for the opening of the third National Indigenous Youth Parliament in May 2017.

Fifty Indigenous young Australians travelled to Canberra to attend the week-long event, which aimed to build leadership skills and reflect on the achievements of Indigenous Australians in shaping our democracy.

Prime Minister Turnbull was joined by Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, friends and families of the 1967 referendum campaigners, along with many other distinguished guests.

As well as developing leadership skills, the youth parliament provided participants with an opportunity to advocate on important issues for closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

In his welcome address, Prime Minister Turnbull reflected on the milestones that have helped Australia chart a course towards reconciliation and healing, including the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, 25 years since the Mabo decision and 20 years since the report *Bringing them home: the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*.



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull opens the National Indigenous Youth Parliament

1 FEDERAL
ELECTION

15,882,788

AUSTRALIANS

ENROLLED TO VOTE



342.1M
AGENCY BUDGET



TOTAL
ONLINE
ENROLMENTS

LARGEST
EVER



ALL 32
KEELTY & ANAO
RECOMMENDATIONS
CLOSED OFF

19
SUBMISSIONS
TO JSCEM

150
ELECTORAL
DIVISIONS
MANAGED

812
INDUSTRIAL &
COMMERCIAL
ELECTIONS &
BALLOTS HELD

766
ROLL SERVICES
PROVIDED FOR
55 STATE, TERRITORY &
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ELECTORAL EVENTS

\$286.6M
TOTAL COST OF
ELECTION

2.7M+
FEDERAL
ENROLMENT
TRANSACTIONS

88.1%
RETENTION
RATE

2,517
EDUCATION
SESSIONS

5M+
WEBSITE PAGES
VIEWED

381
REGISTRATIONS OF
INTEREST FOR
NATIONAL
INDIGENOUS YOUTH
PARLIAMENT

837 REGULAR
STAFF



74,893 TEMPORARY
ELECTION STAFF

ENROLMENT RATE SUSTAINED

OVER 95%
FOR 12 MONTHS

3 ELECTORAL
REDISTRIBUTIONS

- NORTHERN TERRITORY
- QUEENSLAND
- TASMANIA



**NEW POLITICAL
PARTIES
REGISTERED**

184,000

**PUBLIC
ENQUIRIES**