

Countback Counting System

A large, light gray watermark of the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) logo is centered on the page. The logo consists of a large, rounded shape containing the letters 'VEC' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The 'V' is slanted, and the 'E' and 'C' are upright. The background of the logo is a solid light gray, and the letters are white.

VEC

Victorian Electoral Commission

The Countback Counting System

The Local Government Act 1989 requires countback to be used as the first strategy in filling an extraordinary vacancy in multi-vacancy municipal electorates where the original result was calculated using proportional representation. Countback is designed to fill the vacancy in proportion to the amount of support each candidate has in the portion of the electorate that originally elected the vacating candidate. If countback fails to fill the vacancy a by-election is held.

A manual countback can be time consuming even though the scale of countback is smaller than a general or by-election. The essential features of the system are outlined and the scrutiny process described below.

Essentials of Countback

1. Countback fills one vacancy at a time.
2. Candidates who participated in the original proportional representation election who were not elected and are still eligible to be elected may be elected at countback.
3. Countback is a counting system not a voting system. There is no special ballot paper and electors do not cast a vote.
4. The only ballot papers under scrutiny in a countback are those which elected the candidate whose retirement resulted in the extraordinary vacancy. This means that all candidates participating at countback have zero (0) votes at the beginning of scrutiny. Any votes they received in the original election are not counted.
5. A candidate must receive more than half the value of all ballot papers sorted to candidates (an absolute majority) to fill the vacancy.

The Countback Scrutiny

There are several stages in the counting process:

1. The ballot papers that elected the vacating candidate and the value of those ballot papers are determined. The value of each ballot paper is generally the value at which they were originally received by the vacating candidate.
2. All these ballot papers are then transferred to the candidates participating in the countback according to the next preference (the next higher number) marked by voters on the ballot papers. The value received by each candidate is calculated as the number of ballot papers received multiplied by the transfer value disregarding any fraction.

e.g. If a candidate received 46 papers each with a value of $\frac{285}{763}$, when the remainder was disregarded that candidate would have received a value of .

$$46 * \frac{285}{763} = \frac{13110}{763} = 17$$

3. If a candidate receives more than half of the value carried by the ballot papers (an absolute majority), that candidate is elected. The absolute majority is calculated as one more than half the total progressive value with candidates disregarding any remainder:

e.g. If at the end of the distribution of all ballot papers from the vacating candidate the countback candidates have received a total value of 107 the absolute majority, when the remainder is disregarded, is

$$\left(\frac{107}{2}\right) + 1 = 53.5 + 1 = 54.5 = 54$$

4. If no candidate has absolute majority the candidate with the lowest value is excluded.
5. All of that candidate's ballot papers are then transferred to the other candidates according to the next preference (the next higher number) marked by voters on the ballot papers. The value received by each candidate is calculated and added to their progressive total.
6. Absolute majority may have changed and is therefore recalculated using the same formula as before.
7. If still no candidate has absolute majority, then the candidate who now has the lowest value is excluded. That candidate's votes are transferred to the remaining candidates according to the preferences on them. The progressive total values are updated and absolute majority is recalculated.
8. This process continues until one candidate has absolute majority and is declared elected or until there are only two remaining un-excluded candidates. In the latter case the candidate with the higher progressive total value is elected.

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