This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Indigenous right to vote at Federal elections, and 100 years since the right and responsibility to enrol to vote became compulsory.

In March 1962, the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 was amended to enable Aboriginal people to enrol to vote in Federal elections. The VEC will be running a number of activities this year to remind people of this significant point in our history.

While celebrations are a reminder of the work accomplished in achieving legal equality, these also highlight the continuing work required to encourage greater electoral participation by Aboriginal Australians.

Acting Electoral Commissioner Liz Williams says, ‘Despite Aboriginal Australians achieving equality in the electoral process, research shows that Aboriginal participation is not as good as it could be. Aboriginal people are consistently under-represented in Victoria’s democratic system as they are less likely to be enrolled and less likely to vote even if they are enrolled.’

The VEC established its Aboriginal Engagement Program to address these concerns. The program works closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in developing culturally relevant resources and materials, and delivers a range of voter education seminars and workshops. An emphasis of the program is on empowering Aboriginal people through classroom learning and community education, and working with secondary schools to provide young people with a positive experience of democracy in the school environment.

The VEC has also developed partnerships with external organisations like the Richmond Football Club with the Korin Gamadjji REAL Camps to help deliver electoral education to Aboriginal youth identified as being potential role models and leaders.

‘The VEC is committed to access and equity, and through its Aboriginal Engagement Program hopes to ensure that Aboriginal people have the knowledge and opportunity to enrol and to vote,’ Ms Williams says.

The activities of the VEC Aboriginal Engagement Program are guided by an Aboriginal Advisory Group. This group includes a diverse range of prominent Aboriginal people, as well as the Acting Electoral Commissioner and other VEC staff.
Message from the Acting Electoral Commissioner

As Acting Electoral Commissioner, it gives me great pleasure to present this year’s issue of Selections.

It’s certainly been a busy start to the year with the rollout of two State by-elections and the conduct of a further 18 local council or fee-for-service electoral events. We have also seen the conclusion of 28 local council representation reviews and three subdivision reviews, which has been a major exercise for the VEC over the past 12 months. All VEC recommendations have been accepted by the Minister for Local Government and any new electoral structures will take effect from the local council elections in October.

Preparations are well advanced for this year’s local council elections. The redevelopment of the VEC’s election management system is on-track and the work involved in establishing contracts with councils is nearing completion. The Senior Election Official training program has commenced, as has the creation of election products and consignments for election offices. In March, we saw electronic roll-marking successfully implemented at all voting centres for the Niddrie District by-election. The same technology was used for the Melbourne District by-election in July and will be used for eight council attendance elections in October.

This year we commemorate 50 years of the Indigenous right to vote in Federal elections. The VEC continues its efforts to promote enrolment and voting to Indigenous Australians to encourage democratic participation in the electoral system.

After seven years with the VEC, it was with some sadness that we farewelled Steve Tully in April. During his time as Electoral Commissioner, Steve’s strong values of transparency, inclusion and impartiality were central to his work and the VEC saw significant innovation in election conduct and associated reforms. Steve had a keen interest and dedication towards ensuring that all groups within the community have access to the democratic system and was a strong champion of effective programs to ensure maximum enrolment participation and roll integrity. The VEC wishes Steve well for his new appointment as the Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner in South Australia.

Liz Williams
Acting Electoral Commissioner

VEC bids farewell to Steve Tully

On Thursday 26 April, VEC staff, colleagues and friends gathered to bid farewell to the Victorian Electoral Commissioner, Steve Tully.

After an electoral career spanning more than 15 years, including the last seven years at the VEC, Steve accepted an appointment as Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner in South Australia. Originally from South Australia, the move has enabled Steve to rejoin his family on a full-time basis.

The Secretary of the Department of Justice, Penny Armytage, thanked Steve for his significant contribution to electoral administration in Victoria and nationally through his involvement in the Electoral Council of Australia and as a member of the State and Territory Electoral Commissioner’s group, which Steve had originally helped to establish. Steve’s time at the VEC spanned two State elections, six State by-elections, more than 130 local council elections, an Upper House redivision, 84 local council representation reviews and many fee-for-service elections.

Ms Armytage also paid tribute to Steve’s leadership and the many innovations and reforms that have been implemented during his time. Other speakers at the function provided some colourful anecdotes from Steve’s early days as an election official and made reference to Steve’s strong values, compassion, unique sense of humour and his extensive electoral knowledge and experience.

Steve leaves behind many positive legacies that will live on in Victoria and in the broader electoral industry. The VEC thanks him for his years of service as the Victorian Electoral Commissioner.

We wish Steve and his family all the very best for the future.
Legislation makes way for direct enrolment

The inclusion of direct enrolment provisions in the Electoral Act 2002 (Vic) enables the VEC to instigate enrolment of eligible electors on the Victorian register of electors.

Prior to this change, the only method of enrolment was for a person to complete and sign an enrolment form, have the form witnessed, and send it to the Electoral Commission. In order to change an enrolled address, the elector was required to notify the VEC in writing.

In accordance with section 23A of the Act, the VEC can now initiate enrolment for a person entitled to vote, who has not applied to be on the electoral roll within 21 days of this entitlement, as well as directly correct an elector’s enrolled address following receipt and analysis of reliable data.

Up to now, the VEC has used information obtained through its compulsory data acquisition powers for its Continuous Roll Update (CRU) program for the maintenance of the Victorian register of electors. The people identified through this process are mailed enrolment applications, generally prompting them to act.

Taking a cautious approach in implementing this new legislation, the VEC conducted a trial in the lead-up of the 2010 State election. The trial was limited to students registered with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA).

Data from the VCAA helped the VEC to identify 1,886 students that were 18 years of age or older as of 30 September 2010 and who were not enrolled. The students were notified they had 14 days to advise the VEC of incorrect details, and that enrolment provisions only applied to State enrolment.

Only 15 letters were returned undeliverable (no longer at the address) and advice was received in regard to a further 17 students who did not understand the significance of enrolment and voting. Direct action was taken by 105 students to enrol, and the VEC enrolled the remaining 1,749 (93%) electors. Of the electors directly enrolled, 80% voted at the 2010 State election.

The trial was generally well accepted and no flaws were identified in the process adopted. In comparison, when 30,537 people were sent enrolment forms in February 2012 after notifying VicRoads of a change of address, only 19% resulted in enrolments, 73% have not responded to date and 8% were returned to sender.

While these are encouraging results, at the time the trial was conducted direct enrolment did not apply to voting at Federal elections, meaning those enrolled could not be updated on the Federal roll. Recent changes to Commonwealth legislation now allow for direct enrolment for Federal elections. The VEC will continue to work closely with the Australian Electoral Commission to ensure that enrolment in Victoria is administered as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Making strides in Aboriginal engagement

Now in its seventh year, The Long Walk festival continues to attract over 10,000 visitors for a festival of music and community displays. The festival culminates in a symbolic walk of unity and reconciliation to the MCG for the annual clash between Richmond and Essendon — the AFL’s Indigenous Round, which celebrates the contribution of Aboriginal people to the game. For the VEC’s Community Education Team it offers a key opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of engaging with the electoral process among the Aboriginal and wider community. This is particularly poignant this year as the 50th year of the Indigenous vote is celebrated.

With the support of the AEC, the VEC made its first appearance at the festival this year. The VEC Team spread the word about local council elections, raised awareness of the VEC Aboriginal Engagement Program and offered people the opportunity to update their enrolment details. Younger crowds were entertained with the VEC ‘Democracy Snakes and Ladders’, which further ensured the event becomes a fixture on the VEC’s community engagement calendar.
VEC readies for 2012 local council elections

After over 15 years and more than 300 local council general elections, the VEC is once again partnering with Victorian councils to deliver local council elections in 2012.

Since the 2008 general elections, when for first time all 79 councils went to election simultaneously, the VEC has carefully reviewed and refined its operations and procedures following a comprehensive debriefing program with councils and Returning Officers. Changes made for the upcoming 2012 election program include:

- an enhanced computer count application to offer each council its own count within its municipality, without the wait time experienced by shared counting;
- a State-wide advertising campaign that involves a mixture of traditional and new media, focused on increasing voter understanding and participation;
- self-insurance for professional indemnity to achieve further cost savings for local councils; and
- electronic roll mark-off at all early and election day voting centres for each of the eight councils using the attendance method of voting in 2012.

The VEC released its draft election plan for consultation with local councils in October last year and, after a series of information sessions with council officers and feedback from across the State, the VEC completed its service preparations in mid-December.

Preparations involved a large scale costing exercise to assist each council with budgeting and planning for its election expenses. Over the last few months, the VEC’s contract management team has met with each council to discuss its elections requirements, finalise its specifications and explain how these initiatives will improve its elections.

The VEC’s Senior Contract Manager and project manager for the 2012 local council elections program, Keegan Bartlett, said, ‘Councils and council officers from all across Victoria were very interested in how we have responded to their feedback from the last general elections.’

Mr Bartlett said that another common theme in the discussions was the changes in council election legislation since 2008.

‘Earlier this year, the Victorian Parliament changed the local council election date from the last Saturday in November to the fourth Saturday in October, and there have also been a number of other changes to the legislation affecting the election timeline and candidate campaign materials.’

The VEC’s candidate handbooks and voter information campaign will be aimed at making sure candidates and voters alike are aware of the changes and what it means for them at this year’s elections.

Notices for the VEC’s local council election program, including information on each council’s elections, will appear in local papers from August. Details will be also available on the VEC website from Monday 6 August or by contacting the VEC.

Right on track

Accessibility is not just about physical access to voting centres, but also information access.

The VEC’s aim is to have all information in plain language and key information in Easy English. This aim is not only consistent with many Victorian and Australian laws, it is also consistent with the VEC view that all people are equal at the ballot box.

Figures from the 2006 Census indicate that 46 per cent of all readers in Australia are only capable to Literacy Standards 1 & 2, yet Level 3 is considered the minimum standard in today’s society. In addition, more than 216,000 Victorians rate themselves as having little or no English language skills and one in 500 people struggles with speech on a daily basis. In other words, at any one time a major part of the community is unaware of what they don’t know, are reliant on others for information, find it difficult to access websites, may be feeling socially excluded and isolated, and don’t get the information they need to participate effectively in society.

The VEC has a number of resources and tools to facilitate better accessibility to its enrolment and voting education and services — a complete list is available in the ‘Vote’ section of the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au/vote/vote-assistance.html

With all councils having elections in October this year, the following resources and aids will be available:

- Easy English guides for voting in a local council attendance election, local council postal election, the Melbourne City Council election and the Greater Geelong City Council election, and a guide to Running Your Own Election.
- Voting is for Everyone kit (guide for carers and families of voters with multiple/cognitive impairments)
- Homeless Doesn’t Mean Voteless — enrolment and voting information for people experiencing homelessness
- Information leaflet for carers/families of people with a cognitive impairment — advice on enrolling and voting
- Information leaflet for senior Victorians — voting options for seniors who may have vision/mobility issues
- Your Voice, Your Future — a guide to government, elections and voting for first-time voters
- All About Voting kit for teachers or a resource for those for whom English is a second language

Accessibility tools/services

- Access to CCTV
- Braille ballot papers, large print ballot papers and magnifying sheets
- Translated enrolment forms online
- Audio files
- Enrolment outreach sessions for Indigenous communities, people experiencing homelessness and ethnic communities
- Accessible voting screens
- Staff assistance
Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers have been selected from the VEC’s pool of skilled Senior Election Officials (SEOs) across the State in preparation for the 2012 local council elections. The SEOs have been appointed through a rigorous recruitment process and have completed extensive training, as well as associated reading and other home study tasks. In addition to this, the SEOs will complete training that is specific to the type of election they will be conducting at the October elections. Training includes a wide range of practical activities relating to each stage of the election timeline, and provides comprehensive preparation for the elections. Postal elections require a four-day training program, while attendance elections require a five-day term.

Each person has been provided with a comprehensive manual, covering procedures relating to their specific tasks and explaining the VEC’s standards and values.

Once in their election offices, the appointed Returning Officers are responsible for training the election officials they will appoint to assist in the conduct of both postal and attendance elections. This will include office assistants, counting team leaders and counting team members.

Returning Officers for attendance elections will also need to appoint election officials who will fill a variety of roles in voting centres on election day. Election officials will be required to complete online training, while those appointed to more senior roles in the voting centre will also attend a face-to-face training session delivered by the Returning Officer.

Persons interested in working at the 2012 council elections can register via the VEC website from Monday 6 August.

L-R: SEOs Peter Curtis and Steve Hickman, and Trainer Mick Sullivan, discuss points raised by the role play.

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<td><strong>Lodgment of Candidates’ Statements and photographs</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mail-out of Ballot Packs/Uncontested Ward Leaflets</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Nomination Day</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Commence Postal and Early Voting</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mailout EasyVote Letter</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Last day for Registration of How-to-Vote cards</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Close of Postal Voting Application</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Close of Early Voting</strong></td>
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Results declared between Sunday 28 October and Friday 2 November.
Most of the VEC changes recommended were made to structures where there had been substantial change in the municipality. For 10 councils the VEC made a recommendation to move ward boundaries to allow for population shifts, but left the underlying electoral structure untouched. For five further councils the VEC recommended an increase in the number of councillors where population is growing rapidly. In 12 reviews the VEC recommended changes to the councils’ electoral structures, such as altering the number of wards or the number of councillors per ward (see maps below of changes made to Hobsons Bay City Council), and in five cases the VEC did not recommend any change at all.

**Homeless not Voteless: the barriers and opportunities**

Perhaps one of the harder audiences to engage in the electoral system is people experiencing homelessness.

Issues around not having a fixed address for enrolment purposes, the fear of being fined for not voting and basic needs not being met mean that voting may not appear a high priority. Even so, the VEC Community Education Team, in partnership with homelessness agencies across the State, strives to ensure the voice of those experiencing homelessness is heard in upcoming elections.

In preparation for the Melbourne by-election and the upcoming local council elections, the Team has been visiting homelessness agencies to run enrolment outreach services and worker information sessions. Closer to each election, the VEC will revisit these agencies to conduct mobile voting.

Especially important is the need to address the fear that those experiencing homelessness will be fined should they be unable to vote in an election. New legislation relating to the ‘No fixed Address’ category enables the VEC to assure people that this will not be the case.

Valued partnerships with homelessness agencies and participation in homelessness festivals such as the ‘Where the heart is’ community festival ensures the VEC can work towards addressing other common myths and barriers with regard to enrolling and voting.
The Minister for Local Government determined the electoral structure for Hobsons Bay City Council will consist of seven councillors, to be elected from one three-councillor ward and two two-councillor wards. The new structure will take effect from the local council elections in October 2012.

Niddrie by-election summed up

Electors in the inner north-west suburbs’ seat of Niddrie cast their vote in March in a by-election following the resignation of the Hon. Robert Hulls MP on 27 January.

The electoral roll closed for the Niddrie District on 1 March. There were 318 electors that had either enrolled or updated their enrolment details by this date resulting in 36,808 electors on the roll; three more than at the close of roll for the 2010 State election.

Election day was cold and windy, which may have discouraged some electors from voting. The turnout rate of 84.80% was almost 10% lower than for Niddrie District at the 2010 State election (93.63%). For the first time, electronic roll mark-off (using netbooks) entirely replaced paper roll mark-off at all early and election day voting centres. The use of this technology enabled online reporting of the ballots issued to be instantly available to Voting Centre Managers and allowed for speedy ballot paper reconciliation following the close of voting. This system also eliminated the risk of electors being marked off the roll more than once. The data available on election day showed the majority of electors voted between 11.00 am and 3.00 pm.

The data obtained about the flow of electors at voting centres will allow the VEC to assess and estimate staffing requirements more accurately for future elections.

None of the nine candidates achieved an absolute majority of the primary vote, therefore a full distribution of preferences was required to determine the election result. The successful candidate was Ben Carroll of the Australian Labor Party. At the time of going to print, the VEC was conducting a State by-election for Melbourne District. The by-election was held on Saturday 21 July.

A new generation of EMS

The VEC IT Team is continuing a long-term program of works to redevelop and replace the Election Management System (EMS) — the system which has delivered the organisation’s core election services for the past 10 years.

The improved system will build on the VEC’s capacity to manage and respond to changing business and electoral requirements, and will deliver a leading edge electoral service that stands up to scrutiny.

Once completed the system will also provide greater flexibility and efficiency, and the functionality to support future legislative changes, such as e-voting.

While EMS has provided a great platform for the administration and management of elections, the software no longer meets the growing requirements of the VEC. The current system will be redeveloped using new technologies, while the existing functionality and business processes will be generally retained.

The database architecture, however, will be improved to allow for a better dissection of data.

The project will replace EMS module by module, and the new Nominations, Computer Count and Results modules will be deployed for the 2012 local council elections. Separating Computer Count from EMS will allow this application to be accessible from anywhere in Victoria without the VEC having to deploy servers and PCs. This will enable the VEC to conduct a multi-vacancy count within each council for the 2012 council elections, eliminating the wait time resulting from shared counting.

The VEC has completed a tender process for a software package to not only replace the Personnel module within EMS but also provide a single product for all the VEC’s personnel, HR and payroll functions. The VEC anticipates this will be in place in time for the 2014 State election.
New environment bolsters ResourceSmart initiatives

ResourceSmart activities have received a boost from the VEC's move to a modern 5-star rated building that has proactive, environmentally aware building management.

Up-to-date recycling facilities, efficient building design, smart lighting and a positive attitude have seen the VEC show a measurable improvement in resource efficiency.

The ResourceSmart Team is keen to build on its efficiency gains by assisting and encouraging the organisation to go the ‘extra mile’ into the realms of best practice. The Team will continue to conduct waste audits and monitor power, water and paper usage, and aims to make the results of this work available to all staff in a meaningful and accessible way.

Future horizons include a better understanding of the energy usage involved in the VEC's logistical operations outside of its head office, especially during major electoral events. Logistics, as practised by VEC warehouse staff and contractors, is a sophisticated process that has the core object of the greatest amount of work using the optimum amount of time and energy. In short, a ‘ResourceSmart activity’ by any other name.

Similarly, the ResourceSmart Team aims to turn its attention to resource management by election casuals and officials during electoral events. Tentative steps have been taken in past State and local council elections, including the encouragement of party workers to reuse how-to-vote cards, the provision of recycling bins in voting centres and arrangements with local councils for the provision of recyclable waste facilities and pick-up.

Taking elections social

Victorians will be kept informed on all matters relating to elections via social media channels Twitter and Facebook, in addition to traditional means.

Up to now, a typical promotional campaign from the VEC has involved newspaper, online and radio advertising, as well as direct community outreach sessions. However, as of October the VEC will also have an active social media presence.

Twitter will be used to circulate news relating to the VEC, candidate nominations, hourly results, and general enrolment and voting reminders, while Facebook will drive people to the VEC website, promote specific events and competitions, highlight opportunities for employment and encourage people to stand for election.

Acting Electoral Commissioner Liz Williams says, ‘I am pleased the VEC is jumping onboard with social media.

The interactive nature of social media can provide an effective tool through which the VEC can reach out and encourage a greater participation in the democratic process'.

The accounts will be monitored during business hours, with extended hours as necessary during elections. All posting of comments is at the discretion of the page administrators, who will ensure all posts are kept relevant to the VEC and the services the VEC provides. Non-political opinions and debate, however, are welcome.

The VEC Twitter handle is @ElectionsVic, while Facebook users just need to visit facebook.com/electionsvic. ‘Like’ us on Facebook and ‘Follow’ us on Twitter.

The Great Pyramid of Cappuccino: ResourceSmart initiative designed to show the impact of take away coffee cups on landfill.