THE MECHANICS OF AN ELECTION

Staff at the VEC have increased their pace of work in preparation for the State election on Saturday 29 November 2014.

During 2014 all key areas of the VEC have swung into action to meet the September deadline for the establishment of infrastructure that supports an election. The VEC’s warehouse has been fully resourced and is in the process of picking and packing resources for individual election offices, early voting centres and election day voting centres. This includes over 15,000 cardboard items, 47,000 manuals and handbooks and over 400,000 stationery items.

In total, 64 election offices will be established and work is underway to secure suitable premises. To date, 52 premises have been acquired and 12 others are in the process of being finalised. Over 1,700 election day voting centres have been identified, booked and assessed for accessibility and 1,100 hospitals and nursing homes have been contacted regarding mobile voting services.

Over 12 million ballot papers will be produced for the election, with the VEC warehouse currently holding 480 skids (336m²) of paper to be used in the production of ballot papers.
While the VEC delivers electoral services year-round, there is always something special about a State election year and 2014 is no different.

The coming State election will be Victoria’s third under fixed-term legislation. The beauty of a fixed-term election is that it provides certainty when planning and allows the VEC to use resources in a more efficient way. This is more important than ever, given the considerable financial, logistical, administrative and human resources required to deliver a State election. In addition, a flexible employment model allows the VEC to increase its workforce to cover peak times.

For this State election, the VEC is looking to recruit about 17,000 staff to run voting centres, servicing over 3.8 million eligible voters.

As expected with such a high profile public event, all the VEC’s activities must withstand the closest scrutiny. Decisions and actions need to be transparent and compliant so that public confidence is maintained in the VEC’s ability to deliver an impartial, fair, accurate and timely election result. As part of its continuous improvement process, the VEC instigated a review of its logistical practices earlier this year and, as a result, took every opportunity to further improve its processes for the coming election.

From early August, a revitalised website will be supporting the VEC’s work on the State election. The website’s modernised, responsive design will allow it to adapt for use on tablets and mobile devices. The VEC also hopes the website will demonstrate its commitment to inclusiveness through the various design and content considerations made to improve accessibility. This further embeds the VEC’s commitment to ensuring that everyone has the same opportunity to fully participate in their democracy.

While the State election is certainly the highest profile event of 2014, the VEC has also been busy with commercial elections, liquor licensing polls, council by-elections and countbacks. A large number of each of these events have been undertaken in the past year. Planning is also well underway for the next round of electoral representation reviews and the 2016 local council elections.

With such a busy workload planned for the coming three years, the VEC is fortunate to have such a resilient, innovative team, ready to carry out this essential work for Victorian electors.

**Warwick Gately AM**
Electoral Commissioner

---

**MESSAGE FROM THE ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER**

---

**TIMELINE FOR THE 2014 STATE ELECTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 4 November</td>
<td>Issue of the Writs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 13 November</td>
<td>Close of nominations for registered political parties (12 noon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 14 November</td>
<td>Close of nominations independent candidates (12 noon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday 16 November</td>
<td>Final day for lodgement of group voting tickets (12 noon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 17 November</td>
<td>First day for submission of how-to-vote cards to the VEC for registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 17 November</td>
<td>Early voting begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 21 November</td>
<td>Final day for submission of how-to-vote cards to the VEC for registration (12 noon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 28 November</td>
<td>Early voting concludes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 29 November</td>
<td>Election day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During 2012–2013, the Electoral Boundaries Commission (EBC) conducted its first electoral redivision for both Houses of Parliament since 2001. The EBC is an independent statutory body comprising the Chief Judge of the County Court, the Electoral Commissioner and the Surveyor-General. The VEC provides administrative support throughout each redivision.

The primary goal of a redivision is to ensure that every vote at a State election has the same value. That is, each electorate should contain approximately the same number of voters. No electorate should vary from the average by more than 10 per cent. With 34 of the 88 electoral districts outside the 10 per cent threshold at the start of this redivision, major changes were required.

Fifteen districts were abolished and 15 new districts were created, adjustments were made to all but two district boundaries across the entire State. These changes resulted in 1,068,389 electors (more than 29 per cent of the total roll) being transferred to different districts for this year’s State election.

Besides balancing the number of electors, the EBC gave due consideration to the following factors: area and physical features of terrain; means of travel; traffic arteries and any associated special difficulties in their connection; community (or diversity) of interests; and the likelihood of change in the population estimates of localities. For instance, Melbourne’s inner suburbs and the fringes of the metropolitan area are growing rapidly, while in northern and western Victoria enrolments have actually receded (relative to urban areas).

The EBC took population estimates and numerous other factors into account when reviewing the boundaries. However, moving a boundary in one area almost always results in a ripple effect across neighbouring districts. For example, expanding a rural district so that it contains the correct number of voters requires reducing the boundaries of their neighbouring districts. These districts must be adjusted to compensate and this, in turn, alters the boundaries of their neighbours across the State.

The redivision was a public event and the EBC used advertising and other media to invite the public to participate. More than 600 written submissions were received from political parties, Members of Parliament, councils, councillors, community organisations and the general public. These were all published on the EBC website (ebc.vic.gov.au). A total of five public hearings gave the public a chance to have their say and this feedback resulted in substantial alterations of the proposed boundaries and changes to three district names.

The new boundaries and district names will come into effect at the November State election. Electors may now find they are introduced to new candidates and they may prefer to vote at a different voting centre. Electors will be informed of any changes to their district in the EasyVote Guide they will receive in the mail in November. Their current enrolled address will be listed on the EasyVote Card, which is included with the Guide. The VEC’s web address will be provided for further information about the boundary changes.
SOCIAL MEDIA TO TARGET YOUNG, DISINTERESTED VOTERS

A research pilot to engage young, typically disinterested voters via social media will be trialled at this year’s State election. The VEC has appointed OurSay, an online engagement company to provide a positive participation experience for members of the public to use social media to ask questions of their State election candidates.

Using its web-based technology, OurSay leverages popular social media networks to drive active engagement on issues relevant to young people.

Online forums will be created for each of the 88 electoral districts. The forums will enable first time voters to share and prioritise questions in their electorate using social media. The top three questions voted by citizens will inform candidate debates and candidate responses prior to the election. Media support will help promote the forums, along with Twitter and Facebook.

Dedicated campaign managers will promote the online forums to civil and community-based organisations in five selected districts that have typically lower participation among young people [Melbourne, Prahran, Dandenong, Broadmeadows and Buninyong [Ballarat]]. OurSay will organise town hall style meetings for voters to hear the candidates in each of the electorates answer the most popularly voted questions. The individuals who registered the questions will be invited to attend to ask their questions in person. These sessions will be filmed and available online on the forum site.

The experience of participating in the online forum – a community activity that has a positive consequence – is related to the concept of active citizenship that underpins the VEC’s Community Education and Engagement Strategy. This concept aims to make the connection between issues that people care about and politics through positive community activism.

The VEC’s Senior Information Officer, Paul Thornton-Smith, says the pilot will create a valuable data set capturing age, gender, location data and an email contact point for participants – along with a snapshot in time of what the important issues are from a young person’s perspective. This information may then be used to support the design of research and future communication and education strategies. For further information, contact Paul Thornton-Smith on (03) 8620 1187.

MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF THE VICTORIAN VOTE

In view of events in Western Australia at the 2013 Federal election, the VEC instigated a review of its logistical integrity and materials management practices and procedures.

The review closely examined the lifecycle of a ballot paper and identified more than 90 instances where a ballot paper may be handled, transferred, or stored by or between election officials. Each instance was considered and a number of recommendations were made. The recommendations included specific areas for further training of Senior Election Officials, election office staff and election day staff, as well as changes to labels, forms and procedures to improve the accountability of materials and packaging.

The VEC has incorporated the review recommendations into its 2014 State election planning. Victorians can have confidence that the VEC is taking necessary action to protect the integrity of every ballot paper.
We spoke with Zoe Broadway from Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID) about the importance of engaging individuals with a disability in the democratic process. The VEC has been working with VALID to deliver information sessions to individuals with a disability.

What do you think is the biggest challenge of engaging individuals with a disability?

I work mainly with individuals who have an intellectual disability. I think the biggest challenge is accessing information in an easy to understand format and ensuring that information is broken down and delivered in the right way. We are working with some added challenges including learning difficulties, reduced attention span and vision impairment. So it’s been fantastic having face-to-face meetings with the Community Engagement Team from the VEC, as they are able to deliver content in a way that is accessible to this group.

Have you seen a change in voting behaviour from election to election?

I have. When the VEC’s Community Engagement Team first visited us last year, only a few people were enrolled. However, when they visited recently, there were many more people involved. During the sessions many myths were dispelled, people have gained more information on the democratic process and feel as though they’ve been given the opportunity to have a say. Hopefully this engagement will translate to higher enrolments and greater attendance at polling booths.

Why is it important that people living with a disability have a say in the up-coming election?

It’s important for everyone to have their voices heard. People living with a disability are one group in the community that find it difficult to be heard. Yet everyone has a valid opinion and just as much right to have a say about Victoria and Australia.

Anything else you’d like to add?

It’s been fantastic working with the VEC. The approach from the VEC is that they’ve been willing to engage with us and work with our particular requirements. We would love to see more organisations take such a flexible approach.
A NEW WEBSITE FOR 2014

THE VICTORIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION IS ABOUT TO LAUNCH A NEW WEBSITE TO ENABLE GREATER PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN VICTORIA.

A major part of the VEC’s work is to increase enrolment and voting – and to clearly inform people on how to vote correctly. Created with the November 2014 State election firmly in mind, the new website will place particular emphasis on making information accessible and easy to understand.

The website will have a welcoming and personable look and feel. It will be visually appealing with simple icons and a clean layout. A refined navigation menu means most information will only be one or two clicks away.

A key objective of the website refresh is to simplify the language in order to create more understanding around enrolment and voting. To that end, plain English will be used throughout the pages and business critical information will be available in Easy English for anyone who has English literacy difficulties.

The website will be fast loading and display well on both PCs and Macs, across all popular devices (mobile phones, tablets, laptops and desktops) and web browsers, including Internet Explorer, Firefox and Safari.

Initial feedback on the website has been very positive, with a number of participants from groups traditionally considered to be the most disenfranchised members of the community, impressed by the additional features including:

- Open Dyslexic – a special weighted font that assists readers who are dyslexic
- AccessIN – a support service for users with assistive technology that facilitates continuous improvements for the life of the website
- Readspeaker – text-to-speech technology.

“The website is the primary touchpoint for the organisation in any given year or electoral cycle,” said Liz Williams, Deputy Electoral Commissioner.

“This version will be so easy to use, we hope it will encourage those who would typically shy away from accessing information online to become advocates.”

The new website will be launched on 1 August 2014.
The VEC’s State election roadshow will be appearing all over Melbourne in the eight weeks prior to the election, ensuring that enrolling and voting is at the forefront of people’s minds. The roadshow has been designed to give Victorian electors the opportunity to update their enrolment prior to the close of rolls and raise awareness about the State election and electors’ responsibilities in regards to voting.

In 2010, the VEC roadshow resulted in nearly 55,000 interactions with members of the public and 1,401 enrolment forms were completed. This year, the roadshow will be visiting selected suburban, regional and CBD locations and will target areas that typically have a low voter turnout and high voting informality. Locations in Melbourne’s CBD will be selected based on foot traffic and the logistical suitability of the location.
LOOKING TO 2015 AND BEYOND

In early 2015 the VEC will commence a new round of local council electoral representation reviews. Similar to the Electoral Boundary Commission’s recent State redivision, electoral representation reviews are periodically conducted to ensure fairness and equity in electoral representation, primarily by ensuring that each vote within a nominated council has a similar value.

The reviews consider the:

- optimal internal structure of the municipality, such as the number and positioning of wards or whether the council should be unsubdivided; and
- number of councillors for the municipality, and each ward (if applicable), so there is equitable representation for the electorate.

The process does not address external council boundaries.

The Minister for Local Government has so far specified 14 councils that will undergo a review before the next local council elections in 2016. The VEC will also look at other local councils that may benefit from a review at this time and it will be recommended to the Minister for Local Government that these are also reviewed.

It is anticipated that each review will take approximately four months to complete and at the end of the review process, an electoral structure will be recommended to the Minister for Local Government for consideration. Approved changes to electoral structures will come into place at the next round of council elections in 2016.

SMARTER USE OF RESOURCES

The VEC is continuing its commitment to reducing its environmental footprint and has instituted a number of new environmental initiatives over the past year. Most recently, the VEC introduced plastic bag collection points in its staff kitchens for recycling shopping bags and every new staff member is now provided with a coffee ‘KeepCup’ to encourage them to have their daily coffee in a reusable cup rather than adding to landfill with a disposable alternative.

ELECTION FACTS

- Victoria was the first state in Australia to conduct a secret ballot. This occurred in 1856 — prior to that, electors voted on party specific ballot papers.

- In 1914 there were 810,026 Victorians enrolled to vote. One hundred years later, we have 3,748,129 Victorians enrolled to vote (as at 1 May 2014).

- In 1856 elections for the various State districts were spread over a month. This meant that candidates who didn’t get elected in one seat could try again by standing in another seat!