



**ABORIGINAL ELECTOR INFORMATION  
STRATEGY**

**SEPTEMBER 2008 NSW LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

# Table of Contents

<b>Electoral Commissioner’s Foreword</b> .....	3
<b>Why an Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy?</b> .....	4
<b>What is the role of the NSWEC?</b> .....	5
<b>The NSWEC’s Electoral Environment</b> .....	6
<b>Aboriginal Electoral Information Strategy Goals</b>	
<b>Goal one:</b> develop elector information strategies to encourage young and older Aboriginal people to enrol and vote.....	7
<b>Goal two:</b> develop achievable strategies to provide Aboriginal Australians with information regarding the electoral and voting system in NSW .....	10
<b>Goal three:</b> develop strategies to recruit Aboriginal people to work as election officials for the 2008 Local Government Elections.....	12
<b>Goal four:</b> build an understanding of the electoral education and information needs of Aboriginal communities in NSW with a particular focus on young Aboriginal people.....	14

## Electoral Commissioner's Foreword

I am pleased to present the New South Wales Electoral Commission's Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy for the September 2008 Local Government Elections.

The Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy was developed in consultation with Mr Brad Welsh, member of the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group and Ms Kerry Welsh.

The Strategy identifies key goals to assist Aboriginal electors, and particularly Aboriginal youth, to enrol, vote and participate fully in the democratic process. The Strategy also identifies practical achievable initiatives to be implemented at the September 2008 Local Government Elections.

The Strategy is intended to be a living document and will be reviewed after the September 2008 Local Government Elections to examine further improvements.

The NSWEC will also establish an Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group. The Consultative Group will assist with the implementation of the Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy for the 2008 Local Government Elections, and provide ongoing advice to the NSWEC in the development of its electoral education resources and information campaigns.

I am looking forward to continuing the partnerships with representatives from Aboriginal communities in NSW as together we work to promote participation and improve access to the electoral system in New South Wales for people from those communities.



Colin Barry  
Electoral Commissioner

## ***Why an Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy?***

The New South Wales Electoral Commission (NSWEC) has commissioned an Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy for implementation at the September 2008 Local Government Elections.

The purpose of the strategy is to address issues primarily relating to Aboriginal enrolment and voting and to develop practical and achievable strategies to increase Aboriginal enrolment, improve the provision of information to Aboriginal electors and promote the recruitment of Aboriginal Australians to act as electoral officials for the September 2008 Local Government Elections.

The information strategy identifies four key goals for implementation at the 2008 Local Government Elections. These are to:

**Goal one:** develop elector information strategies to encourage young and older Aboriginal people to enrol and vote

**Goal two:** develop achievable strategies to provide Aboriginal Australians with information regarding the electoral and voting system in NSW

**Goal three:** develop strategies to recruit Aboriginal people to work as election officials for the 2008 NSW Local Government Elections

**Goal four:** build an understanding of the electoral education and information needs of Aboriginal communities in NSW with a particular focus on young Aboriginal people.

The Strategy was developed in consultation with Mr Brad Welsh and Ms Kerry Welsh, who assisted the NSWEC with the development of the Aboriginal<sup>[1]</sup> Elector Information Strategy for the March 2007 State General Election.

The Strategy addresses what is achievable for the September 2008 Local Government Elections. It will also address issues that were raised in the course of consultations through the establishment of an Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group.

This Consultative Group will assist in implementing strategies addressed in the Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy for the 2008 Local Government Elections, and will provide ongoing advice to the NSWEC in the development of its electoral education resources and information campaigns.

---

<sup>[1]</sup> Aboriginal in this document also refers to people of Torres Strait Islander Descent. Aboriginal has been chosen since the vast majority of Indigenous people in NSW are of Aboriginal descent.

## ***What is the role of the NSWEC?***

The NSWEC's role is to provide high quality election services that are impartial, effective, efficient and in accordance with the law.

The NSWEC is responsible for:

- conducting elections for the Parliament of NSW and elections for local government council elections
- conducting elections for registered clubs, statutory boards and State registered industrial organisations
- working with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) in the management of the joint electoral roll in NSW
- providing administrative support to the Election Funding Authority (EFA).

The NSWEC recognises the diversity of the New South Wales community and the demand for high quality electoral services to meet a wide range of needs, expectations and levels of understanding of the democratic system.

The NSWEC Corporate Plan for 2008 to 2011 commits the NSWEC to review and increase the effectiveness of current information and education strategies to engage aboriginal communities.

The NSWEC Values statement provides direction and guidance for the organisation in order to conduct its business in an ethical manner and includes:

- integrity in the way that we approach our work
- impartiality in the conduct of elections to gain and maintain the confidence of clients and the community
- respect for the needs of all in our community to ensure equal access to democracy
- professionalism in providing election services
- fostering a learning culture amongst our staff so as to be a modern, forward thinking organisation that can meet the challenges of emerging issues.

## ***The NSWEC's Electoral Environment***

Elections are conducted in a high profile environment where impartiality, accuracy, reliability and efficiency are essential.

The NSWEC's work is undertaken within a strict legal framework. Under the *Local Government Act 1993* every aspect of the conduct of elections is clearly defined including the timeframe for conducting the election, entitlement to pre-poll and postal voting, and the way to cast a valid vote, The NSWEC has no discretion in the matter.

The Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy for the September 2008 Local Government Elections will provide improvements to electoral services that comply with the prescriptive provisions of electoral legislation.

## **Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy Goals:**

### ***Goal one: Develop elector information strategies to encourage young and older Aboriginal people to enrol and vote***

#### **Overview**

The Aboriginal population is very young with 70% of its members being under the age of 30 years (50% being under 15 years). Targeted enrolment strategies for young and older Aboriginal people need to employ different approaches.

Young Aboriginal people need effective role models within the community such as sporting, acting and media personalities to personally promote the potential of enrolling and voting to make a difference to how their needs are represented in Parliament. Making enrolment both convenient and appealing to young Aboriginal people is important.

The NSWEC will have a presence at significant Aboriginal community events, particularly Yabun (known to Aboriginal people as survival day). This will be an opportunity to promote enrolment to Aboriginal youth and communicate important electoral messages. This is likely to be possibly the most significant opportunity for the NSWEC to directly enrol a large number of Aboriginal people.

It is also important that older Aboriginal people be informed regarding the value of their vote. Older Aboriginal people who are not enrolled to vote may be more difficult to engage in the voting process.

It is suggested that measures taken to attract this group need to be directly aimed at what their vote means and how important each vote is. Educational material should be developed to provide examples of situations where Members of Parliament have been elected on a relatively small number of first preference votes.

Educational material that builds on the demographic that Aboriginal people comprise at least 2% of the Australian population (more than 2% in some rural and remote seats) could be a key stimulus to vote as this is a significant enough number to influence results in some electoral districts.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Seek the assistance of Aboriginal community representatives to identify Aboriginal personalities to endorse the value of enrolling and voting for young Aboriginal community members.
2. Engage young Aboriginal talent for the NSWEC advertising campaign in order for young Aboriginal people to identify more with the electoral process. The talent should be young member of the Aboriginal community and have a reasonably high public profile in the Aboriginal community.
3. Promote through Aboriginal community representatives and networks the current availability of the online enrolment form on the NSWEC website ([www.elections.nsw.gov.au](http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au)) as a convenient means to enrol and to help overcome the perception of barriers to becoming enrolled.

4. Through the Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group, develop electoral education materials for Aboriginal youth using the stories of past and present Aboriginal leaders who fought strongly for the right to vote. This message could have the capacity to build a sense of responsibility amongst Aboriginal young people to enrol and cast their votes.
5. NSWEC to have a presence at significant Aboriginal community events such as Yabun with a stall to encourage Aboriginal people at the event to enrol and also to provide information about the electoral process.
6. NSWEC to keep records at Yabun of:
  - number of Aboriginal people who enrol to vote on the day
  - number of Aboriginal people who expressed interest in working as an election official at the 2008 Local Government Elections.
7. In consultation with Aboriginal Community Organisations identified by NSWEC Aboriginal consultants, provide enrolment information packages to their members to encourage people to enrol and vote.
8. For older Aboriginal people, in partnership with Aboriginal community representatives and the AEC, identify areas of low Aboriginal enrolment and develop strategies to promote enrolment to these communities.
9. Through the Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group, develop electoral education materials for older Aboriginal people to attempt to highlight to older Aboriginal people that even though they may not make up a large percentage of the Australian population the votes that they cast are still important and can indeed influence the results in individual electoral districts.
10. In partnership with Aboriginal community representatives work with the strong connections in the Aboriginal community to promote a sense of responsibility to enrol and vote among those who are not yet enrolled.
11. In partnership with the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, investigate the possibility of mapping Aboriginal languages to local government areas.

## **Performance Measures**

1. Aboriginal personalities identified to endorse the value of enrolling and voting for young Aboriginal community members.
2. Young Aboriginal talent engaged for the NSWEC advertising campaign in order for young Aboriginal people to identify more with the electoral process.
3. Aboriginal community representatives and networks promote the current availability of the online enrolment form on the NSWEC website ([www.elections.nsw.gov.au](http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au)).
4. Electoral education materials for Aboriginal youth developed using the stories of past and present Aboriginal leaders who fought strongly for the right to vote.
5. NSWEC enrolment and information stall established at Yabun on 26 January 2008.

6. At Yabun, records kept of :
  - number of Aboriginal people who enrol to vote on the day
  - number of Aboriginal people who expressed interest in working as an election official at the 2008 Local Government Elections
7. Aboriginal Community Organisations identified by NSWEC Aboriginal consultants, provided with enrolment information packages.
8. For older Aboriginal people, in partnership with Aboriginal community representatives and the AEC, identify areas of low Aboriginal enrolment and develop strategies to promote enrolment to these communities.
9. Through the Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group, develop electoral education materials for older Aboriginal people to attempt to highlight to older Aboriginal people that even though they may not make up a large percentage of the Australian population the votes that they cast are still important and can indeed influence the results in individual electoral districts.
10. In partnership with the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, create a local government areas map that identifies Aboriginal languages spoken in that area.

## ***Goal two: Develop achievable strategies to provide Aboriginal Australians with information regarding the electoral and voting system in NSW***

### **Overview**

It is challenging to disseminate printed electoral material to the Aboriginal community. There are a number of different existing networks that can be utilised in order to disseminate this information. It is likely that the best possible way to disseminate information regarding the electoral and voting system is to develop short information sheets in plain English and disseminate them through the networks of Aboriginal Community Organisations and the NSWEC website.

### **Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that a voter information package be developed by NSWEC in regard to the 2008 September NSW Local Government Elections. The package could include a series of one page fact sheets with information about for example:
  - The NSW electoral system
  - A timeline of the history of the Aboriginal vote
  - Enrolment forms
  - A “how to vote” guide (including information on casting a valid vote) in plain English
  - Information on who is required to enrol
  - Information on the responsibilities of people enrolled to vote
  - Information on what your local member can do for you
2. Make available voter information packs developed by NSWEC at Yabun (and possibly other venues).
3. Aboriginal community organisations distribute an electronic version of the electoral information through email networks and newsletters.
4. Plain English electoral information be made available on NSWEC website in an accessible format.
5. NSWEC develops a “train the trainer” package with Local Councils that have a high proportion of Aboriginal electors.
6. The NSWEC to establish links with the NSW Department of Education with a view to provide the department with electoral education material suitable for use by Aboriginal Education Assistants in State schools.
7. Distribute Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy to Aboriginal Community Organisations.
8. Distribute media releases and/or fact sheet outlining important messages about electoral information to major Aboriginal newspapers, radio stations and television programs.
9. NSWEC to develop an electronic distribution list of key peak Aboriginal organisations for distribution of electoral education and information materials.

## **Performance Measures**

1. NSWEC develops voter information packs for the 2008 September NSW Local Government elections.
2. Voter information packs are distributed to people at events where NSWEC has a presence.
3. NSWEC pilots a train the trainer package with local government councils that have a high proportion of Aboriginal electors.
4. NSWEC distribute an electronic version of the voter information pack to Aboriginal community organisations for them to distribute through their networks.
5. Voter information made available on NSWEC website in an accessible format prior to 2008 Local Government elections.
6. Links with the NSW Department of Education will be established with a view to developing with the department electoral education material suitable for use by Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEA's) in State schools.
7. Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy distributed to Aboriginal Community Organisations.
8. Media releases and/or fact sheet outlining important messages about electoral information distributed to major Aboriginal newspapers, radio stations and television programs.
9. An electronic distribution list of key peak Aboriginal organisations developed for distribution of electoral education and information materials.

## ***Goal three: Develop strategies to recruit Aboriginal people to work as election officials for the 2008 NSW Local Government Elections***

### **Overview**

Recruitment of committed Aboriginal people as election officials is viewed as integral to ensuring that more Aboriginal people enrol and exercise their right to vote. It is important to seek to employ Aboriginal people as election officials particularly in areas where Aboriginal people are likely to reside and cast their votes.

Workers required for this task need to be politically neutral, have strong communication skills and be able work with large numbers of people participating in the electoral process.

A presence at significant events (such as Yabun) not only provides an opportunity to get a message to the Aboriginal community (for example we need more Aboriginal people to work as election officials) but also an opportunity for Aboriginal community members to ask questions of NSWEC and its staff about current initiatives.

Within NSW there are seven Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) agencies. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy is a relatively new initiative, which aims to link employers with suitable Aboriginal employees.

Attention should focus on the following areas:

- Glebe
- Blacktown
- Campbelltown
- Tamworth
- Moree
- Dubbo
- Maitland

It is recommended that to develop better ways of disseminating recruitment information to Aboriginal communities that Aboriginal media outlets, Koori Interagencies and the executive of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy be involved in the process.

Further approaches should include the development of NSWEC recruitment advertisements for placement in Aboriginal media and/or interviews with the Electoral Commissioner on Aboriginal Radio programs across NSW.

Another approach to be considered for the dissemination of recruitment information is to utilise the already existing Aboriginal networks (such as Koori email networks).

### **Recommendations**

1. NSWEC to liaise with the AEC to seek their assistance to recruit Aboriginal people who have previously worked for the AEC on the ATSIC and Federal elections.

2. NSWEC provide the executive of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy with information on working as electoral officials and electoral official recruitment packs.
3. NSWEC utilise existing Peaks such as Koori Interagencies and the AES to disseminate information regarding various employment opportunities as election officials.
4. NSWEC target potential Aboriginal employees for all aspects of electoral employment through advertisements in Aboriginal print media.
5. NSWEC should engage some Aboriginal people with particular knowledge of the voting system to man the stall at Yabun in conjunction with NSWEC staff.

### **Performance Measures**

1. NSWEC liaises with the AEC to seek their assistance to recruit Aboriginal people who have previously worked for the AEC on the ATSIC and Federal elections.
2. The executive of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy is provided with information on working as electoral officials and electoral official recruitment packs.
3. Information is disseminated to Peaks such as Koori Interagencies and the AES regarding various employment opportunities as election officials.
4. NSWEC advertisements in Aboriginal print media target potential Aboriginal employees for all aspects of electoral employment.
5. Aboriginal people with particular knowledge of the voting system engaged to man the stall at Yabun in conjunction with NSWEC staff.

## ***Goal four: Build an understanding of the electoral education and information needs of Aboriginal communities in NSW with a particular focus on young Aboriginal people.***

### **Overview**

Aboriginal Australians make up approximately 2% of Australia's population. According to the Aboriginal consultants engaged by the NSWEC the Aboriginal community can sometimes feel removed from the electoral process. It follows that information and education campaigns designed for the wider community may have very little effect in Aboriginal communities.

In addition the consultants advise that due to additional factors within the Aboriginal community such as interrupted education and low levels of literacy there needs to be a sustained effort to address what the community perceives are the current barriers to enrolment. This requires longer term strategies.

The fact that enrolment involves a number of steps is seen to be problematic. For instance the following is required in order to become enrolled and each step provides challenges.

1. Request an enrolment form from NSWEC or go to an Australia post outlet or download from the NSWEC or AEC websites
2. Complete this form, sign the form and have it witnessed
3. Post the form back to NSWEC or AEC

The NSWEC is largely unknown to Aboriginal people in NSW which makes it difficult to engage actively with the Aboriginal community.

As a first step, an important initiative is for NSWEC to have a presence at significant community events such as Yabun. This strategically places the NSWEC to promote enrolment to Aboriginal communities including Aboriginal youth within the context of the community's own celebrations.

The electoral education and information needs of Aboriginal communities in NSW, the NSWEC will need an ongoing relationship to promote enrolment and voting among the community including Aboriginal youth.

Involving members of the Peak Aboriginal organisations who are engaged and enrolled may help overcome the current barriers to enrolment by utilising community networks to encourage the enrolment of community members and friends.

NSWEC will establish a forum for ongoing consultation such as an Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group. This would initially meet before the 2008 September Local Government Elections to provide an advisory forum for the development of appropriate communication and education strategies to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities.

### **Recommendations**

1. In the run up to the 2008 Local Government Elections NSWEC to develop a visible presence at Aboriginal community events such as Yabun to provide electoral information and enrolment advice (in conjunction with Aboriginal community members).

2. Establish an Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group consisting of representatives from Peak Aboriginal groups to assist in the implementation of the Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy for the 2008 Local Government Elections, and to provide ongoing advice to the NSWEC in the development of its electoral education resources and information campaigns.

**Performance Measures**

1. The NSWEC has a visible presence at Aboriginal community events such as Yabun to provide electoral information and enrolment advice (in conjunction with Aboriginal community members).
2. An Aboriginal Electoral Education Consultative Group consisting of representatives from Peak Aboriginal groups is established before the 2008 Local Government Elections to assist in the implementation of the Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy for the 2008 Local Government Elections, and to provide ongoing advice to the NSWEC in the development of its electoral education resources and information campaigns.