
SERVICES TO ELECTORS

Enrolment

Every Australian citizen resident in New South Wales, who is 18 years of age or older, is required to enrol and vote at Federal, State and Local Government elections and referendums.

A citizen is eligible to enrol if they meet the following criteria:

- 17 years of age or older (but you cannot vote until you are 18);
- Australian citizen (or a British subject who was on an Australian electoral roll on 25 January 1984); and
- resident at your present address for at least the last month.

Enrolment requires that a completed electoral enrolment form is provided to the NSWEC or AEC.

The New South Wales electoral roll is managed by the AEC including the addition of electors' names and amendments to their enrolment details.

The NSWEC undertakes initiatives in the lead up to elections to promote enrolment in New South Wales.

Enrolment initiatives in the lead up to the 2007 State election

Encouraging 17 and 18 year olds to enrol

In October 2006, using Board of Studies data, the Electoral Commissioner wrote to all 17 and 18 year old New South Wales school students completing the HSC to encourage them to enrol to vote. The letter advised the students that they were able to enrol from the age of 17 and were required to enrol when they turned 18. Approximately 38,000 students were sent the letter.

In February 2007 a follow up letter was sent to approximately 22,000 students who did not respond to the initial letter. The second letter served as a reminder of the 2007 State election and contained an enrolment form and reply paid envelope to further assist young people to enrol.

There were 11,985 17 and 18 year olds who enrolled in response to the initial mailout and 7,966 who enrolled in response to the second. While it is good that these 17 and 18 year olds enrolled, it is disappointing that there is still a large number of eligible young people who did not. It seems that young adults do not respond well to processes that require them to complete and return a form to enrol. Direct enrolment based on authoritative information from agencies such as the Board of Studies would have more positive results.

Enrolment and electoral information stall at Yabun 2007

The NSWEC developed an Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy aimed at tackling the problem of disengagement in the voting process within the Aboriginal community (see p38 for more details).

As part of this strategy the NSWEC had a stall at Yabun 2007, an Aboriginal festival held on 26 January each year. The stall was run by NSWEC staff and Aboriginal community representatives to provide electoral information and an enrolment service to those in attendance. The aim was to increase Aboriginal enrolment, improve the provision of information to Aboriginal electors and promote the recruitment of Aboriginal electors to act as election officials for the 2007 State election.

The stall was a great success and almost 100 electors were enrolled. The Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC, CVO lent her support to the initiative by assisting to enrol young Aboriginal electors.

Close of roll

Once the Writs for the election were issued on 5 March 2007, electors had until 6pm that day to enrol or update their enrolment details.

The NSWEC placed enrolment advertisements in major metropolitan, regional and ethnic newspapers from 19 February until 1 March reminding electors that the election was to be held on 24 March and that in order to vote they had to be on the electoral roll, and to enrol or update their enrolment details.

The NSWEC also ran television and radio commercials from Thursday, 15 February until Thursday, 1 March ensuring that as many people as possible had time to check that their enrolment details were correct.

Electors were able to obtain an enrolment form from the NSWEC office, AEC divisional offices, Australia Post offices and the NSWEC or AEC websites. Electors were able to post or hand deliver their enrolment forms to either the NSWEC or AEC.

The AEC processed 185,350 changes to the New South Wales electoral roll from 30 January 2007 until the close of roll on 5 March 2007. At the close of roll at 6pm on Monday, 5 March, 4,374,029 people were enrolled to vote in the 2007 State election, compared with 4,272,104 at the 2003 State election. (Appendix I contains details of electoral district enrolments as at the close of roll.)

The use of iRoll at polling places allowed election officials to inform electors if they were no longer on the electoral roll or had incorrect enrolment information recorded. This subsequently resulted in many electors completing a new enrolment form to re-enrol or update their enrolment details.

Voting

Arrangements for voting before election day

Electors who were unable to vote on election day had various options to cast their votes prior to election day either at designated pre-poll voting centres or declared institutions in New South Wales, at interstate or overseas locations, or by post.

A total of 463,187 electors cast votes before election day either by post, by voting at pre-poll voting centres or by voting at a declared institution. This represented 11.4% of the total votes admitted to the count at the election. This is an increase of 152,798 when compared with 310,389 votes cast before election day in 2003.

Pre-poll voting centres

Pre-poll voting was available to electors if on polling day they would be:

- out of New South Wales;
- more than 8 kilometres by the nearest practical route from a polling place;
- travelling and unable to attend a polling place;
- unable to vote because of religious beliefs or membership of a religious order;
- caring for a person not in a hospital who is seriously ill or infirm or approaching maternity;
- at work; or
- a silent elector.

All returning officers' offices were used as pre-poll voting centres (except in Blacktown where the pre-poll voting centre was located within the same building as the returning officer's office). An additional 54 pre-poll voting centres were established, many in regional electoral districts, to accommodate electors whose residence was some distance from the returning officer's office.

Electors were able to pre-poll vote at any of the 147 pre-poll voting centres across the State. The majority of these pre-poll voting centres were open for the two weeks prior to election day from Monday, 12 March until Friday, 23 March. Standard hours of operation were 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday. Most pre-poll voting centres were also open from 8am to 8pm on Thursdays and from 9am to 5pm on Saturday, 17 March for electors unable to vote during standard business hours.

See Appendix 2 for the list of pre-poll voting centres.

A total of 223,266 pre-poll votes cast prior to election day were accepted into the count.

There is an increasing demand by electors to have more pre-poll voting options as getting to a polling place on election day can be difficult. There is also pressure from electors in regional and coastal locations for additional pre-poll voting facilities in towns on shopping or market days. Possible changes which could be made to pre-poll voting are discussed at p84.

Declared institution voting

The Electoral Commissioner has the power to appoint hospitals, nursing homes, retirement villages and like facilities as declared institutions. Declared institutions are visited by election officials on the Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday in the week of the election for the purpose of taking votes from residents who are unable to attend a polling place on election day. It should be noted, however, that it is up to the manager of each facility to agree to these visits. In many cases managers advise the NSWEC that this service will not be required as their residents are too sick or frail to vote. In some cases the NSWEC received representations from family or friends of residents to provide the service. Further contact was made with the manager. In all such instances the NSWEC was given approval to attend.

The NSWEC wrote to all establishments known from the past State and Federal elections. Unfortunately there is no one State agency which can provide details of all establishments that come within the declared institutions classification. As a result, it is difficult to identify all possible declared institutions to make early arrangements.

There were 661 declared institutions appointed for use in 2007 compared with 704 locations in 2003, and 15,970 votes cast at these facilities were accepted into the count, which was 3,154 more votes than in 2003.

The statutory time limit for conducting voting at declared institutions (over the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of election week) may pose problems for the NSWEC if there is an increase in demand for this service. Given the ageing population it is likely that this will occur.

A list of declared institutions is attached at Appendix 3.

Postal voting

Electors could cast their votes by post if on polling day they would be:

- out of New South Wales;
- more than 8 kilometres by the nearest practical route from a polling place;
- travelling and unable to attend a polling place;
- seriously ill or infirm or approaching maternity;
- caring for a person not in a hospital who is seriously ill or infirm or approaching maternity;
- unable to vote because of religious beliefs or membership of a religious order
- in prison;
- at work; or
- a silent elector.

Electors were able to pick up a postal vote application form from the NSWEC, returning officers' offices, from an Australia Post office in New South Wales, download it from the NSWEC website or by calling the NSWEC election information centre and having an application form posted to them.

Registered political parties were also able to send postal vote application forms to their constituents in the weeks before election day.

Electors were able to post or fax (but not email as a signature is required) their completed postal vote application forms to the NSWEC. The Act requires electors who lodge a postal vote application from interstate or overseas to send their applications back to the NSWEC by 6pm on the Monday before election day. This was 19 March 2007. Applications sent from within New South Wales must be received by the NSWEC by 6pm on the Wednesday before election day. This was 21 March 2007.

Every effort was made to process all applications in a timely manner, and a processing centre was set up within the NSWEC to handle postal vote applications forwarded by the main registered political parties.

Once the applications had been processed, electors were sent postal vote ballot papers for their electoral district and a declaration envelope for their return to the NSWEC. Electors were required to complete the ballot papers and sign and date the certificate in the presence of a witness. The ballot papers in the declaration envelope could be handed in at any polling place on election day or posted to the returning officer by 6pm on the Wednesday after election day (28 March 2007) in order for them to be admitted to the count.

Of the 282,913 postal votes issued (including registered general postal votes), 223,951 were returned while 58,962 were not.

Postal voting remains a concern for those electors in remote parts of the State. In some areas, Australia Post only provides a weekly service. Returning officers process postal vote applications on the day they are received and, if a person qualifies, will send the postal ballot papers the same day. If the elector only has a weekly mail delivery service, they may not receive their postal vote in sufficient time to complete and return it to the returning officer by the statutory time for inclusion in the count.

The NSWEC has received representations from parties, candidates and some rural community groups to improve this situation but as the legislation stands there are limited options available. Possible changes which could be considered are discussed at p82.

Registered general postal voters

Electors may apply to become a registered general postal voter provided they:

- live more than 20 kilometres by the nearest practical route from a polling place;
- will not be within New South Wales during any period that exceeds 3 months;
- are a patient in a hospital and too ill or infirm to travel;
- are seriously ill or infirm, live at home and cannot travel;
- are caring for a person not in hospital who is seriously ill or infirm and cannot travel to a polling place;
- are in prison but serving a sentence of less than 12 months;
- have a physical disability which prevents them from signing their name and when they enrolled provided a doctor's certificate to that effect;
- are a silent elector; or
- have religious beliefs or membership of a religious order which preclude them from attending a polling place or voting on election day.

Registration as a general postal voter means that these electors do not have to apply for a postal vote at each election. Details are held by the AEC which provides the returning officer with a list so that these voters can be automatically issued with ballot papers as soon as possible after the close of nominations when the draw for position of candidates and parties on the ballot papers has been conducted and ballot papers printed.

Postal votes were issued to 59,846 registered general postal voters at the 2007 State election, with 50,155 of these electors returning their ballot papers.

Mailout to remote areas of New South Wales

In February 2007 the AEC conducted a mailout to electors in remote areas of New South Wales to better inform them of their voting options. These areas were defined as the Local Government Areas of Balranald, Bourke, Carrathool, Central Darling, Cobar, Hay, Unincorporated Far West and Wentworth. Included with the registered general postal voter enrolment form was a short survey about voting options, and an information brochure detailing the methods of voting.

Approximately 3,000 letters were sent and 578 applications were received.

Voting at interstate and overseas locations

New South Wales electors, who were interstate or overseas at the time of the election, had the opportunity to cast a pre-poll vote at 11 interstate locations compared with 8 in 2003, and 27 overseas locations compared with 43 in 2003 during the election period.

Interstate voting took place at Electoral Commissions in all Australian jurisdictions and some additional facilities were included in areas where there was expected to be a level of demand.

Overseas voting locations were chosen based on the level of attendance at facilities offered for the 2003 State election, and taking into account areas where a greater Australian presence could be anticipated in 2007.

An elector may vote at an interstate or overseas location either:

- in person, during normal office hours until the close of business on the Thursday before election day if overseas, or the close of business on the Friday before election day, if interstate; or
- by writing to any of the overseas postal voting offices and requesting a postal vote application.

A total of 5,622 votes were cast at interstate voting locations with 21.8% cast in Canberra and 18.3% cast in Melbourne.

A total of 6,609 votes were cast at overseas voting locations in 2007, an increase of 2,180 compared with 2003. 36.9% (2,437) of the total overseas votes in 2007 were cast in Hong Kong and 16.7% (1,105) cast in London.

A list of interstate and overseas facilities is attached at Appendix 4.

Voting at sea

For the first time, electors unable to vote on election day due to a pre-arranged holiday on a cruise ship were able to cast a postal vote on board.

The NSWEC met with representatives from Carnival Australia, the owner of P&O Cruises, to make arrangements for the passengers on two cruise ships which were affected. It was agreed that postal voting packs would be delivered to docks in Melbourne and Fremantle so that those aboard the *Pacific Princess* and the *Sapphire Princess* would have the opportunity to vote. These packs contained postal vote applications, ballot papers and a declaration envelope for the elector to enclose their completed ballot papers. Once their votes had been completed, electors were required to return their postal voting packs to the purser's office by a specified date prior to election day.

Antarctic Voting

A person who is or will be in Antarctica in the course of their employment on polling day can request to vote as an 'Antarctic elector'. At the 2007 State election there were 32 Antarctic electors.

'Antarctic' as defined for the purpose of being an Antarctic elector includes the Australian Antarctic Territory, the Territory of Herald Island and McDonald Islands, Macquarie Island and, in some cases, ships in transit.

Antarctic electors' names are retained on the electoral roll for their State electoral district, and electors vote for that district. It is not compulsory for electors in Antarctica to register as an Antarctic elector and vote at an election because the secrecy of the vote cannot be assured due to the process used to transmit the results.

The NSWEC appointed Antarctic Returning Officers (AROs) and Assistant Antarctic Returning Officers (AAROs) to enable New South Wales electors, who were registered Antarctic electors, stationed at bases in Antarctica to vote. AROs and AAROs were appointed for the 2007 State election at four research bases (Casey, Davis, Mawson and Macquarie Island).

A roll of electors and the relevant ballot papers were emailed through to the AROs for these four bases following the close of nominations. After the close of polls each ARO phoned the votes through to the NSWEC where the voting details were recorded onto ballot papers and sent to the electors' home districts. The original ballot papers filled out by Antarctic electors were packaged up and returned to the NSWEC on the first available supply ship.



Arrangements for voting on election day

Voting took place between 8am and 6pm at 2,576 polling places throughout New South Wales on election day, Saturday, 24 March 2007.

Electors were able to vote at a polling place within their electoral district (cast an 'ordinary vote'), or vote at any other polling place in the State outside their electoral district by casting an 'absent vote'.

A review of all polling places was conducted prior to the election using a statistical analysis of past voter patterns, projected enrolment figures and availability of suitable premises. Where appropriate the NSWEC used the same polling places that were used at the 2004 Federal election.

In 2003 2,768 polling places were used across New South Wales. The reduction in the number of polling places in 2007 was a result of the polling place review. It aimed to address the under-utilisation of polling places in regional areas which took less than 100 votes in 2003, and to rationalise the number of polling places in metropolitan areas which were in close proximity to each other. A list of polling places can be found at Appendix 5.

The number of staff at each polling place was calculated by using a formula which took into account the number of ordinary and absent votes at the 2003 State election and the anticipated votes in these categories given demographic changes. An examination of the data following the 2007 State election shows that the large majority of venues were appropriately staffed.

An accessibility audit of venues was also conducted and all polling places were classified according to recognised national accessibility standards. They were classified as either having full wheelchair accessibility or as not being wheelchair accessible as requested in discussions with peak disability groups in New South Wales.

Polling places were established mainly in schools and community halls. Where possible, within the constraints of the election, buildings with full wheelchair access were selected as polling places. The fact that the NSWEC does not own the buildings used as polling places and only leases them for the day restricts the level of modification possible.

Polling place locations and their accessibility status were advertised in a polling place supplement placed in *The Land*, *The Sun-Herald* and *Sunday Telegraph* prior to election day. This information was also published on the NSWEC website and available through the NSWEC's election information centre.

Improving services for electors

Electors with a disability

In 2006 the NSWEC developed an Equal Access to Democracy Plan to identify key issues that impact on access to and participation in the democratic process for people with disabilities. The Plan was developed through a series of consultations with peak disability consumer and industry organisations in New South Wales.

The five key goals of the Plan are to:

- establish partnerships with peak bodies to promote equal access and participation;
- provide inclusive and accessible election information;
- promote equal access at buildings used at elections;

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- enable election staff to provide assistance that promotes equal access and participation; and
 - provide more options that promote equal access to voting.

A number of key initiatives were implemented at the 2007 State election to improve access to electoral information and voting. These included:

- conduct of disability awareness training by Vision Australia to assist returning officers and election officials in recognising the needs of people with a vision impairment and how to be of assistance to electors with a disability;
- review of election furniture for all pre-poll voting centres and polling places to include wheelchair accessible voting booths and luminous contrast design on cardboard furniture to assist electors with depth perception;
- review of polling place layouts to facilitate access and egress;
- trial of an Easy English 'Train the Trainer' electoral education module with the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association and the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability to assist in better educating people on the electoral process using a simple to understand format;
- distribution of Equal Access to Democracy newsletters through disability peak community networks;
- provision of key election information in Braille, audio, large print and electronic formats;
- use of a number of Vision Australia and Spastic Centre premises as pre-poll voting centres and polling places on election day;
- availability of hand-held magnifiers and user-friendly chunky pencils at all pre-polling and polling places;
- use of open captioning on NSWEC television advertisements, a first for a New South Wales Government advertising campaign; and
- conduct of accessibility audit of all pre-poll voting centres and polling places and classification of them as having full wheelchair access or no wheelchair access as requested by the peak disability groups.

Aboriginal electors

The NSWEC developed an Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy to address issues of disengagement with the voting process within the Aboriginal community.

The information strategy was developed to:

- assist young indigenous Australians to enrol and vote at the March 2007 State election;
- increase the enrolment and participation of adult indigenous Australians;
- develop achievable strategies to provide indigenous Australians with information regarding the electoral and voting systems in New South Wales; and
- develop strategies to recruit indigenous Australians to become election officials for the 2007 State election.

In order to promote enrolment and increase access to electoral information for the Aboriginal community, the NSWEC had a stall at the Aboriginal festival Yabun 2007 held on 26 January 2007. This enrolment and information stall was jointly staffed by NSWEC officers and Aboriginal community representatives. Staff processed almost 100 applications for enrolment, confirmed the enrolment details of many electors through the use of iRoll and provided electoral information packs to interested Yabun participants.

The NSWEC encouraged enrolled Aboriginal community members to work as an election official on election day by distributing expression of interest forms at Yabun 2007, and through the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, a not-for-profit organisation that specialises in placing Aboriginal people into employment.



Electors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

At all pre-poll and polling places, a multilingual poster was displayed indicating the availability of election information in 24 community languages and also indicating which, if any, languages were spoken by election officials. Handouts explaining how to cast a formal vote for both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council were also available in the 24 community languages at polling places.

At polling places located in areas with large numbers of electors from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, returning officers endeavoured to employ multilingual election officials.

Elector information campaign

The NSWEC ran an extensive elector information campaign to increase public awareness, understanding and participation in the 2007 State election.

The key objectives of this campaign were to:

- advise electors of the new electoral district boundaries;
- maximise the number of electors enrolled to vote;
- encourage electors who had turned 18 years of age or would be 18 at the date of the election to enrol;
- remind those who had recently moved address to update their enrolment details;
- publicise voting arrangements to all electors including people with disabilities, people from CALD backgrounds, Aboriginal electors, electors from regional and rural New South Wales and those who were interstate and overseas; and
- minimise informal voting.

Elector brochure mailout

Between Monday, 29 January 2007 and Friday, 9 February 2007 all electors in New South Wales received a personalised elector brochure from the NSWEC (sample brochure attached at Appendix 6).

The 2004 redistribution of electoral district boundaries meant that approximately 25% of electors in New South Wales were voting in a new electoral district for the first time. It was important that electors were informed of the redistribution and provided with election information relevant to them.

The brochure contained information specific to individual electors including the electoral district they were enrolled in and a map of the district. The Easy Voting Card on the brochure contained the elector's enrolment details including name, enrolled address, date of birth and electoral district and could be taken with them when voting to make it faster and easier.

Further important information in the brochure included the date of the election, hours of voting, information on pre-poll and postal voting, how to find out details regarding polling places, the election information centre telephone number, the NSWEC website address and information on ways for people from CALD communities and people with various disabilities to access information and services.

Elector information campaign

Following a competitive tendering process an advertising firm was appointed to develop and manage the elector information campaign.

The theme of the campaign was 'Your Vote is Your Voice. Be Heard' which emphasised the importance of voting and how individual voices can be heard in the democratic process when people exercise their right to vote.

This campaign comprised television, radio and press advertisements featuring the campaign theme and focussing on key electoral messages appropriate to each phase of the election. Extensive advertising appeared in New South Wales metropolitan, regional and ethnic media.

Images from the advertising campaign were also incorporated into NSWEC publications and used at the tally room on election night. A full list of where the NSWEC placed advertising during the election is provided at Appendix 7, and samples of the press advertising appear at Appendix 8.

During the election some candidates complained that the NSWEC did not place advertisements in all suburban papers. The NSWEC had sought the advice of the advertising consultant on the scope of the print advertising to achieve best value for money. The advice was that it would not be practical to advertise in every local paper. Given the cost of advertising the NSWEC will review its strategy prior to the next State election in 2011 to ensure the most appropriate choices are made. The increasing use of the internet in advertising will also be examined.

Advertising in regional and rural New South Wales

The NSWEC also ran a comprehensive campaign through television, radio and the written press in rural and regional areas. Advertisements appeared on 38 regional radio stations and 50 regional newspapers (see Appendix 7).

The advertisements informed electors of enrolment requirements, voting options before election day, how to vote and where to find more information about polling places for election day.

The NSWEC and contractor worked closely with the government contracted media booking agency, Media Com, to ensure that the NSWEC advertising campaign was effective in communicating key election information to voters throughout New South Wales. The placement and scheduling of advertisements in the appropriate newspapers and on the appropriate radio and television stations were essential.

Independent research conducted after the election found that radio was particularly effective in reaching regional and rural electors, and that awareness of the NSWEC's advertising campaign was higher in regional and rural New South Wales than in metropolitan areas.

Improving information services

Electors with physical disabilities

The NSWEC worked in conjunction with Vision Australia to provide electors with a vision impairment key information in a range of alternative formats such as Braille, large print and audio formats. Materials were distributed to individuals and also to peak disability consumer and industry organisations.

As part of the NSWEC information campaign, advertisements from the NSWEC election advertising campaign were featured in Radio for the Print Handicapped broadcasts in Albury, Bathurst, Sydney and Katoomba.

The NSWEC also produced election information in Easy English for electors with intellectual disability for distribution through peak disability consumer and industry organisations.

Aboriginal electors

The NSWEC voter information campaign engaged young Aboriginal actors to feature in the television campaign and Dean Widders, a prominent Rugby League player, was engaged as the voice of the radio campaign featured on Koori Radio. The key suite of press advertisements was placed in the *Koori Mail* and the *National Indigenous Times*.

Electors from CALD backgrounds

The NSWEC's elector information campaign included specific strategies to provide information to electors from CALD backgrounds including advertising in the ethnic press and on ethnic television and radio. Materials were designed to ensure these electors received information to help them understand and participate fully in the 2007 State election.

To ensure this aspect of the campaign was successful an independent CALD media specialist was engaged. The campaign included advertisements in community languages run in 44 ethnic newspapers and on 103 ethnic radio programmes (see Appendix 7 for details).

The proportion of the elector information campaign budget spent on ethnic advertising was 13% for press and 7% for electronic media. These percentages are above the minimum required by New South Wales Government policy.

Election information centre

The NSWEC ran a successful election information centre as an integral part of the elector information campaign. For the cost of a local call, people from all over New South Wales could get up to date information and advice from experienced, well-trained customer service staff.

The election information centre was based at the NSWEC warehouse in Riverwood and operations began on the 29 January 2007 to coincide with the elector brochure mailout.

Up to 70 operators were available to answer calls at any one time. All operators participated in a training session, and were provided with an extensive Question and Answer manual, prepared by NSWEC staff, prior to commencing their work.

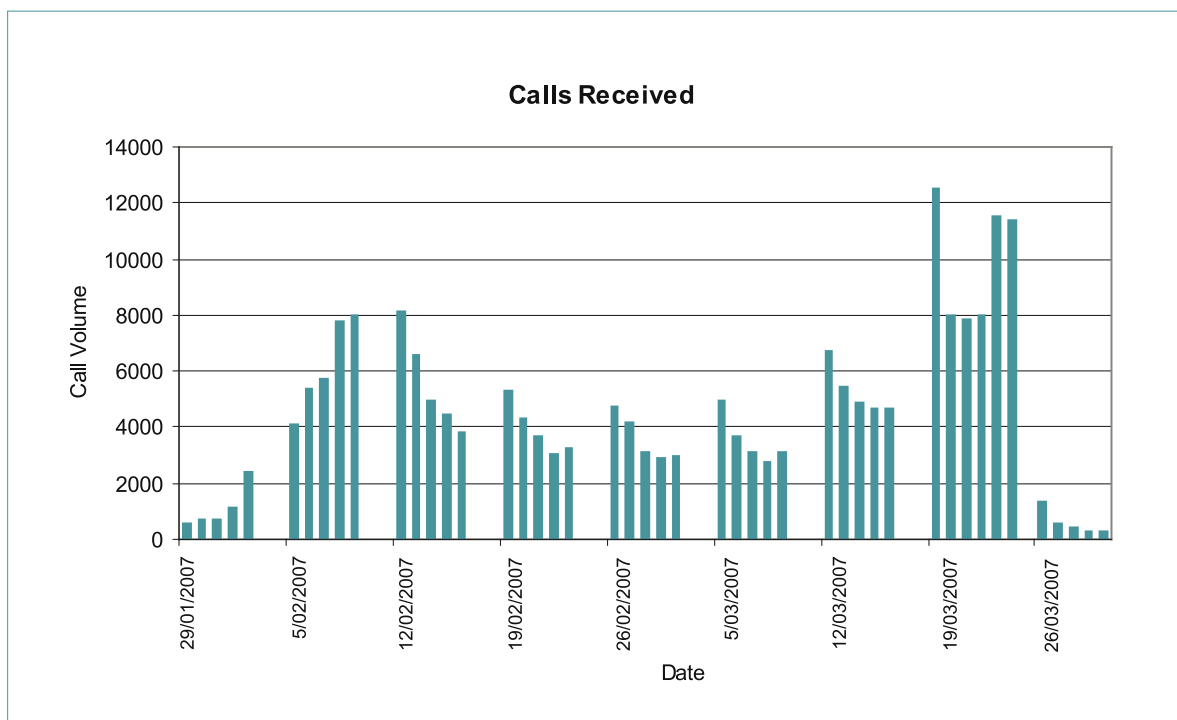
The manual contained information to enable the operators to answer questions regarding:

- how to enrol, update enrolment and check enrolment details;
- voting options including pre-poll voting, postal voting and voting on election day;
- voting locations in New South Wales, interstate and overseas;
- how and where to nominate as a candidate;
- how to apply to work as an election official; and
- how to find results after the close of the polls.

The election information centre operated from 8.30am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, and from 7.30am to 7pm on election day. It received 208,046 calls from 29 January to 30 March with peaks in call volume during the week before election day (19 March to 24 March). 11,393 calls were received on election day itself.

Callers with questions not covered in the manual were referred, in the first instance, to a team supervisor who had received additional training. If the enquiry was of an extremely technical nature it was referred to the appropriate staff member at the NSWEC for resolution.

The cost of establishing and running the election information centre was \$612,958.



Telephone interpreting service

A telephone interpreting service for electors from CALD backgrounds was also provided during the election. Advertising in both the ethnic media and in the English language press referred people to this service. The Department of Immigration's Telephone Interpreting Service was engaged to provide multilingual telephone interpreter services.

To use this service callers rang a central number and spoke to an operator who arranged for an interpreter in the appropriate language to participate in a three-way conversation with the NSWEC election information centre. This allowed callers to receive answers to their particular questions in their own language.

From the delivery of the elector brochure, up to and including election day, the multilingual enquiry service received a total of 1,825 calls.

Electronic information

NSWEC website

The NSWEC website (www.elections.nsw.gov.au) was completed prior to the 2007 State election and was a key communication tool.

Key stakeholders considered in the redevelopment of the NSWEC website included:

- electors;
- registered political parties;
- candidates;
- media; and
- general community.

During the election period, key information on the NSWEC website was updated on a daily basis to reflect the changing phases and priorities.

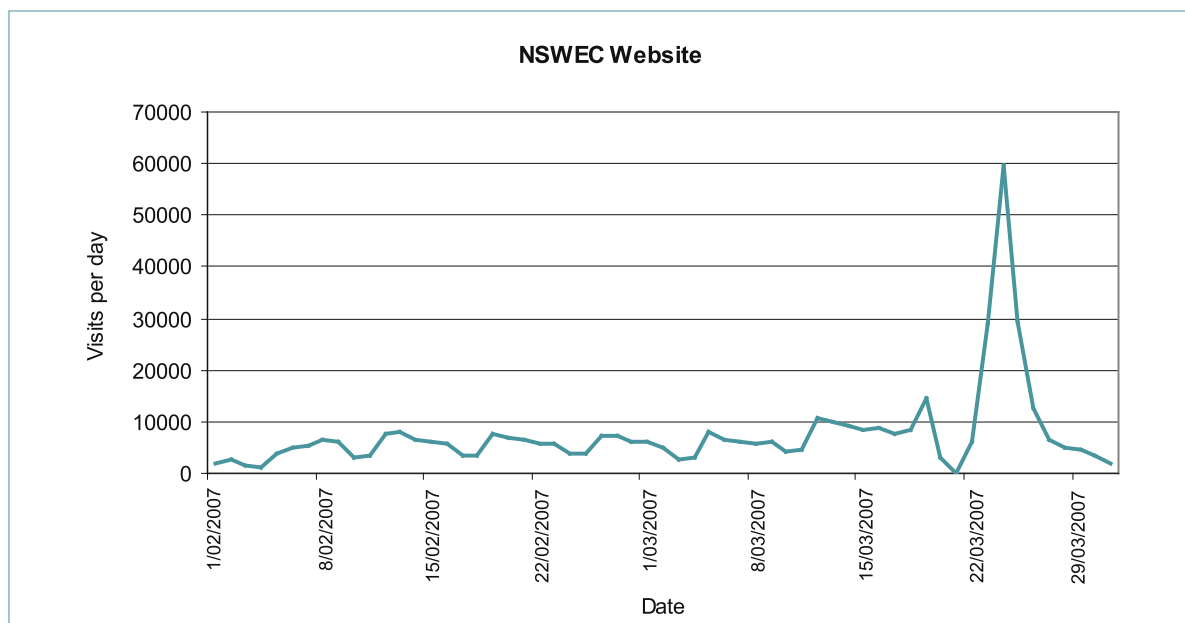
Electoral profiles, including maps and statistical data, were available on the site as were enrolment and postal voting application forms. Electoral district maps displaying the location of polling places, pre-poll voting centres and returning officers' offices were highly utilised by website users.

The results for the Legislative Assembly were shown in various configurations. These included:

- district summaries;
- first preference results from election night;
- first preference results post election night;
- notional distribution of preferences; and
- final preferential count.

The Legislative Council results included detailed reports showing Members elected and the quota of votes won by each party.

The website proved to be an invaluable resource as shown below.



NSWEC virtual tally room

From election night onwards Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council results were available from the 2007 State election 'virtual tally room'.

The virtual tally room was a separate link on the NSWEC website which could be accessed by anyone interested in seeing the results as the votes came in. The results for both Houses were displayed in 'real time' through a direct link to the website from the NSWEC computer election management application system into which the 93 returning officers across the State were entering the results.

On election night the virtual tally room had peaks of over 5,000 unique visitors per hour.

The final results, with a full distribution of preferences for the Legislative Council, were released on the virtual tally room on 12 April 2007.

iRoll

The iRoll project was an initiative developed by the NSWEC and successfully implemented at the 2007 State election.

An application was developed to allow the New South Wales electoral roll to be loaded onto a personal digital assistant for use by election officials. The main benefit of this application was that if a person attended a polling place and wished to vote as an absent voter the election official could quickly and accurately determine in which district the person was enrolled.

There were two aspects of the iRoll use which should be noted. First, it meant that the number of rejected absent votes was reduced. The reason being that in the past if a person attended a polling place to vote as an absent voter it was accepted that they were enrolled in the district they stated. However, when the declaration envelope arrived at the returning officer's office and a check was done to match the name of the person on the envelope with the roll for that district, if they were not on the roll then the vote was not admitted to the count. In such instances the elector was unaware that this had occurred.

Second, if an elector was not enrolled anywhere in New South Wales, this was verified by checking iRoll. Previously, as election officials did not have access to the State roll, they could not verify an elector's enrolment outside the district. Some in the media misinterpreted this situation and reported it as if mistakes had occurred. What they did not appreciate was that for a variety of reasons a person's enrolment had lapsed and they were not on the roll for any district.

The AEC, the Electoral Commission Queensland, the Tasmanian Electoral Commission and the Victorian Electoral Commission have all bought a number of iRolls and have or will use the iRoll application at their elections. The intention is that all iRolls will be pooled to enable any one of these Commissions to have access to a larger number of devices than would otherwise be the case. The NSWEC has purchased 470 iRolls but because of this pooling system had 2,300 iRolls in use at polling places throughout New South Wales on election day. The available iRolls were issued to those polling places near electoral district boundaries or those expected to take a large number of absent votes (estimated on the basis of the 2003 figures).

Further information on the iRoll appears at Appendix 9.

Election management application

Well before the election, the NSWEC developed the computerised election management application (EMA) which is made up of an integrated suite of software modules to assist with:

- the processing of candidates' nominations;
- recruitment of election officials;
- the issue and receipt of declaration votes;
- election results;
- processing of enquiries and non-voter excuses;
- the processing of public funding of elections and funding disclosure information; and
- general election administration.

EMA users completed a training programme in the new system and were provided with user manuals for each individual module of the application.

EMA went live in November 2006 and was of great benefit to NSWEC staff, returning officers and clerical assistants in the State election period as it automated many routine clerical tasks.



Non-voters

Enrolment and voting at the 2007 State election were compulsory for people who were:

- 18 years of age or older;
- Australian citizens (or a British subject who was on an Australian electoral roll on 25 January 1984); and
- living at their present address for at least the last month.

The NSWEC has an obligation under electoral legislation to issue a penalty notice to an elector indicated in the electoral records as having failed to vote. Following the election, electoral rolls were scanned to identify those electors whose names had not been marked off the roll.

In June 2007 the NSWEC sent failure to vote notices to 152,091 electors. This is a decrease of approximately 50,000 compared with notices sent after the 2003 State election. The notice provides the elector with the options of:

- advising, in writing, their reason for not voting;
- claiming they did vote and providing details of where they voted;
- paying the penalty of \$25; or
- applying for the matter to be heard by a Court.

Electors are required to reply within 28 days of the issue date of the notice. If they do not, they are sent a penalty reminder notice and if they still fail to respond, the matter is sent to the State Debt Recovery Office for further action.

For the first time an online and telephone autopay system was introduced which made it easier for people to pay their penalty notice. Following previous elections non-voters were required to send the NSWEC a cheque, money order or their credit card details on the back of the penalty notice in order to pay their penalty. The new system led to an improved response from non-voters and an increase in the receipt of penalty fees.

In 2003 there were 207,000 penalty notices sent compared with 152,091 in 2007.

Review of performance

Debriefs

Equal Access to Democracy debrief

The NSWEC conducted a debrief with representatives from peak disability consumer and industry organisations on Friday, 27 July 2007.

The debrief was a productive and informative session allowing the NSWEC and the peak disability bodies to review the actions implemented at the 2007 State election and exchange views regarding planning for future elections. Key issues discussed at the workshop included:

- the importance of giving people the opportunity to vote;
- a review of accessibility guidelines for returning officers' offices, pre-poll voting centres and polling places;
- methods for advertising accessibility to provide electors with the most useful information;
- transport to polling places for people with a disability; and
- eVoting and iVoting options.

The workshops also addressed strategies to continue improving access for electors with disabilities including a revision of the Equal Access to Democracy Plan for the 2008 Local Government elections.

The NSWEC will continue to consult with peak disability consumer and industry organisations through an online reference group in the lead up to the 2008 Local Government elections. The online reference group was suggested by the peak organisations as being a practical way of ensuring ongoing consultation. It is intended that issues will be raised and discussed via an email network. The reference group will also assist the NSWEC in distributing important information to electors with a disability through the peaks' networks and newsletters.

Aboriginal elector information debrief

The NSWEC has reviewed the implementation of the Aboriginal Elector Information Strategy and identified additional strategies to further increase Aboriginal involvement.

The use of Aboriginal networks to distribute election information was a useful means to provide information to Aboriginal people. Further strategies need to be developed to encourage Aboriginal electors to apply to work as election officials at future elections. While many Aboriginal people submitted expression of interest forms at Yabun 2007, the NSWEC needs to further develop partnerships with organisations such as the Aboriginal Employment Strategy to achieve a wider distribution and uptake.

In early 2008 the NSWEC will establish and convene an Aboriginal Consultative Group consisting of key Aboriginal organisations in New South Wales to improve Aboriginal participation at the 2008 Local Government elections.

Complaints

The NSWEC received 216 written complaints about a variety of election service issues from 29 November 2006 until 31 May 2007. An overview of some of the complaints is given below.

This is the first time information regarding complaints has been recorded and reported. Many of the complaints related to the activities of candidates or registered political parties. Some complainants expected the NSWEC to intervene when there was no role for the NSWEC as the activity was not in breach of the Act.

Elector brochure mailout

29 complaints were received by the NSWEC regarding the elector brochure mailout. The complaints primarily raised concerns over the use of date of birth and personal details on the Easy Voting Card. The NSWEC will review whether any future Easy Voting Card will include date of birth.

The reason for including the date of birth was that as a result of legislative change, for the first time, electors' date of birth would be printed on the electoral roll used by election officials. Election officials were required to ask electors their date of birth as one of the statutory questions to be put to electors to establish their entitlement to vote. Including date of birth on the Easy Voting Card enabled electors to correct any errors prior to the close of rolls.

Electoral districts

10 complaints were received about electoral districts with most complainants referring to the changes made as a result of the redistribution of electoral district boundaries conducted in 2003 - 2004.

Many complaints related to electors' dissatisfaction with particular district boundaries. These issues had nothing to do with the State election or the NSWEC.

Enrolment details

51 complaints were received regarding enrolment details with the majority of complainants stating that information they received contained incorrect details such as their enrolled address or date of birth. Many of these had arisen because electors had not kept their enrolment details up to date over a period of time.

Postal votes

23 complaints were received from electors relating to postal votes. The two main issues were the delay experienced by electors in receiving their postal vote ballot papers and the distribution of postal vote applications by the political parties.

The apparent non-delivery of some postal votes is an ongoing issue. All postal vote applications were processed at returning officers' offices, however, Australia Post remains an important partner in the postal voting system.

An overview of complaints from or about the registered political parties, candidates and the media can be found on p59-60.