Report to Parliament on
the administration of the
1999 Victorian State election

The Hon Bruce Chamberlain, MLC
President of the Legislative Council

The Hon Alex Andrianopoulos, MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

I am pleased to submit to you, for presentation to the Parliament, my report on
the administration of the Victorian State election held on 18 September 1999.

The report is presented as required by section 144D(1)(d) of The Constitution Act
Amendment Act 1958.

Colin Barry
Electoral Commissioner
15 May 2000
Foreword

The 1999 Victorian State election will be remembered as one of the most significant in Victoria's history. The final outcome saw the Kennett Coalition Government defeated after seven years in office and replaced by the Australian Labor Party with the support of three independent members of the Legislative Assembly. The election of three independents to the Legislative Assembly was an unprecedented outcome in fifty years of Victorian State elections.

Also unprecedented was the news on the afternoon of election day that one of the candidates for Frankston East District had died. As required by law, the election for Frankston East failed and a writ was issued for a supplementary election which was held four weeks after the State election. The significance of the supplementary election was not apparent until the days immediately following the State election, when it became clear that no party had sufficient numbers to form a government. During this period there was constant media speculation regarding the final outcome. These circumstances caused the Frankston East supplementary election to be the most vigorously contested election in recent history, and the media scrutiny of candidates and political parties was extremely intense. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), and the returning officer for the supplementary election, went to extra lengths to ensure that all electors who were eligible to vote at the election were able to do so, and the VEC came through this period extremely well and without criticism.

The 1999 State election result saw some of the closest voting in recent history; Geelong District was won by just sixteen votes and Gippsland Province by 688 votes. Because of this, the electoral administration was put under very close scrutiny, and it is pleasing to report that the VEC’s election procedures withstood this scrutiny. There were no appeals to the Court of Disputed Returns regarding any of the election results.

The period of uncertainty following the State election posed an additional challenge for the VEC. Usually, after a State election the returning officers complete their work in approximately four weeks and the temporary office accommodation is dismantled. On this occasion, with no party able to form a government, and the independents not indicating which party they would support until after the completion of the Frankston East supplementary election, it was not certain whether another State election might be required. Under these extraordinary circumstances it was necessary to ensure that the infrastructure remained in place to enable the VEC to conduct another State election if required. As things transpired, after the result of the Frankston East supplementary election the independents decided to support the Australian Labor Party, which was able to form a government with a majority of one, and the possibility of another State election receded.

The 1999 State election result will possibly be one of the most analysed Victorian State elections in modern times. This election report is an important record of the administration and conduct of this significant election. The VEC introduced modern electronic management practices that would improve election services to voters. This report comments on the performance of critical election arrangements and procedures and, where appropriate, indicates directions for future improvement. The report also makes a number of recommendations to deal with areas in need of urgent legislative change.

Finally, the contribution made by the VEC’s staff, who provided tireless effort and personal commitment to ensure the highest quality electoral services were provided to the electors of Victoria, should be acknowledged.

Colin Barry
Electoral Commissioner
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Introduction

The State election held on 18 September 1999 saw a change of Government in Victoria. The former Coalition Government of the Liberal and National parties won a total of 43 Legislative Assembly seats, and the Australian Labor Party won 42 seats. The Australian Labor Party formed Government with the support of the three independent MPs.

On 24 August 1999, the Premier, the Hon Jeffrey Kennett, MP, announced that the Victorian State election would be held on 18 September 1999.

In addition, three by-elections were announced for:
- Ballarat Province—due to the resignation of the Hon Robert Knowles, MLC;
- Melbourne Province—due to the resignation of the Hon Barry Pullen, MLC; and
- Melbourne North Province—due to the resignation of the Hon Caroline Hogg, MLC.

In each case, the Member of the Legislative Council had resigned prior to the expiry of their term (due to expire at the State election following this State election).

The key dates for the State election and the three simultaneous Province by-elections were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue of writs</td>
<td>24 August 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close of rolls</td>
<td>27 August 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close of nominations</td>
<td>12 noon, 3 September 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election day</td>
<td>18 September 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return of writs</td>
<td>on or before 8 October 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, a supplementary election was required for the Legislative Assembly District of Frankston East due to the death during the State election of the sitting Member and candidate, Mr Peter McLellan, MP. The date of this supplementary election was 16 October 1999.

The key dates were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue of writ</td>
<td>21 September 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close of roll</td>
<td>27 August 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(same date as the State election)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close of nominations</td>
<td>12 noon, 1 October 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election day</td>
<td>16 October 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return of writ</td>
<td>on or before 29 October 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The State election at a glance

Voter turnout at Victorian State elections 1988-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State election</th>
<th>Voter turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. The figures used in this table relate to Legislative Assembly elections only.
2. The figure for 1999 includes the Frankston East supplementary election.

Voter turnout at Australian elections 1991-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>94.7%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. The figures used in this chart relate to Lower House elections only.
2. The figure for the 1999 Victorian State election includes the Frankston East supplementary election.
Informal voting at Victorian State elections
1988-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State election</th>
<th>Rate of informal voting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. The figures used in this table relate to Legislative Assembly elections only.
2. The figure for 1999 includes the Frankston East supplementary election.

Informal voting at Australian elections 1991-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Informal votes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. The figures used in this chart relate to Lower House elections only.
2. Full preferential voting is used in Federal, Victorian, Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory elections.
4. Optional preferential voting is used in New South Wales and Queensland elections.
5. Partial preferential voting is used in Tasmania and the ACT, which have multi-member electorates, and voters must number at least as many squares as there are vacancies in the electorate.
6. The figure for the 1999 Victorian State election includes the Frankston East supplementary election.
Close of roll figures for Victorian State elections 1988-1999

Votes cast on and before election day at Victorian State elections 1988-1999

Notes:
1. The figures used in this chart relate to Legislative Assembly elections only.
2. The figures for 1999 include the Frankston East supplementary election.
### Declaration votes at Victorian State elections 1988-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Declaration Votes ('000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Registered general postal voters at Victorian State elections 1992-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Registered General Postal Voters ('000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Votes at interstate and overseas locations at Victorian State elections 1992-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Votes ('000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cost of Victorian State elections 1992-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cost ($ mil)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>$12.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$21.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes all direct costs plus apportioned costs of IT development and VEC general expenses. Includes Frankston East supplementary election.
Legislative changes affecting the 1999 Victorian State election

The Attorney-General introduced The Constitution Act Amendment (Amendment) Bill 1999 (the Bill) into Parliament on 15 April 1999, and it became law on 6 June 1999. The legislative changes included a number of amendments to The Constitution Act Amendment Act 1958 (the Act) that modernized the management of the electoral rolls and improved the administration of parliamentary elections. The Bill also widened the VEC’s charter to explicitly include promoting public awareness of electoral matters through education and information programs.

The Bill introduced the following changes to election procedures for the 1999 State election.

1. The Electoral Commissioner is to be the Electoral Registrar for all Districts and Provinces

The Act formerly allowed the Electoral Commissioner to appoint electoral registrars. However, it did not make it clear that the Electoral Commissioner is the Registrar for the State and consequently has the power to manage the entire enrolment process, including performing such functions as deleting, adding and transferring electors as required from the electoral rolls. The legislation amended the Act to make it clear that the Electoral Commissioner is the Electoral Registrar for the State in order to improve the efficiency of managing the electoral roll.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

Some of the functions in the Act previously carried out by electoral registrars for individual subdivisions are now carried out centrally by the Electoral Commissioner.

2. Electoral Commissioner to be responsible for all election advertisements

Previously the Electoral Commissioner was responsible for placing certain election advertisements and returning officers were responsible for placing others. Under the new legislation the Electoral Commissioner is responsible for placing all electoral advertisements.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

It was possible to produce advertising centrally for the State election without making reference to these advertisements being placed on behalf of individual returning officers.

3. Nominations

The legislation:

- enabled registered political parties to nominate their candidates with the Electoral Commissioner up to 24 hours before the close of nominations. Thereafter they could nominate their candidates with the appropriate returning officer;
- increased candidates’ deposits from $250 to $350 for the Legislative Assembly, and from $250 to $700 for the Legislative Council;
- enabled candidates’ deposits to be made in building society, credit union or non-bank financial institution cheque, or by bank cheque or in cash; and
- clarified that a candidate could nominate for only one Province or District.
Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

At the State election 319 nominations were lodged with the Electoral Commissioner. This represents all the nominations made by registered political parties.

There was no negative feedback on the increase in the amount of the candidates’ deposit, and candidates made good use of the facility to lodge deposits by non-bank financial institution cheques.

There is no evidence of candidates nominating for more than one District or Province at Victorian State elections in the past. The change in legislation removed the possibility of a candidate being able to do this.

4. Draw for candidates’ positions on the ballot paper

The legislation provided for a single random draw or for a computer generated random draw for the position of candidates on the ballot paper.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

The electronic draw was successfully employed at the State election, removing large data entry and subsequent quality assurance steps from the process. It significantly increased the efficiency of providing the result of the ballot draw to the media and ballot paper printers.

The electronic draw for ballot positions was accepted by candidates and the media attending ballot draws. The printing of candidates’ names in ballot paper order immediately after the draw was considered to be an improvement on the previous practice of waiting for data entry and proof reading.

5. Questions put to voters

One of the questions put to voters by polling officials before they vote was “Where do you reside?” The legislation changed the question to “Where do you live?”

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

This change was well accepted at the State election.

6. Period when returning officers can accept postal votes

The legislation reduced the period within which postal and absent votes may be accepted by returning officers for scrutiny from 13 days to 9 days.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

There were no instances where postal votes were post marked on or before election day and received by returning officers after the nine-day cut off.

7. Assistance to disabled electors

A polling place manager was able to assist a disabled elector to vote outside a polling place.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

The VEC issued directions to polling place managers regarding the provision of assistance to disabled electors. Typically, it enabled a polling place manager to take ballot papers to a disabled elector who may have been driven to the polling place. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of voters took advantage of this new facility.

8. Restrictions on exit polling

The legislation prohibited the release of exit polling figures prior to the close of polling at 6 pm on election night, and required that any person conducting an exit poll at a polling place be subjected to the same restriction as people distributing how-to-vote cards. Exit polling is therefore not permitted within 6 metres of a polling place.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

A company which had conducted exit polling at previous by-elections was contacted prior to the State election. The company indicated that it was already aware of the change in legislation. No exit polling took place at the State election.
9. Savings provisions removed so that full preferential voting applies at parliamentary elections

Voters are required to indicate preferences for all candidates standing in an election. A number of provisions to save certain types of votes were removed so that these votes would be informal and excluded from the count. The legislation therefore established Victoria's voting system as a full preferential voting system.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

It has been usual practice at past elections to emphasise the correct way to vote, and this message was again clearly presented in the VEC's advertising for the 1999 State election.

The legislative change meant that certain types of votes, which had previously been regarded as formal votes and included in the count, would now be regarded as informal votes. There was no evidence of this having a significant impact on the rate of informal voting at the election.

10. Political parties may attach an application for a postal vote to other political material

The legislation enabled political parties to attach an application for a postal vote to a brochure or handbill that may contain political material.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

The new legislation worked well and enabled the VEC to address any complaints from electors regarding political material accompanying a postal vote application.

The VEC will meet with the main political parties who issue postal vote applications to discuss improvements in the design of the application forms.

11. Expand the categories of people who are eligible to register as a general postal voter

The following categories of people became eligible to apply to become a general postal voter and in so doing have their ballot papers sent to them without application at the time of an election:

- persons caring for others who are seriously ill or infirm;
- silent electors; and
- persons whose religious beliefs prevent them from attending a polling place on election day.

This brought the criteria for eligibility to be a registered general postal voter into line with the requirements of Federal legislation.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

The number of general postal voters increased from 9,587 at the time of the 1996 State election to 17,452 at the 1999 State election. This was mainly due to changes in the legislation at Federal and State levels.

12. The Electoral Commissioner is to be responsible for identifying non-voters

The Electoral Commissioner was made responsible for identifying non-voters. Previously returning officers were required to perform this task.

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

This improved the efficiency of implementing the compulsory voting provisions by centralising the process using the VEC's new Election Management System.

13. One ballot paper for all types of voting

Legislation reduced the number of different types of ballot papers to one type only—covering ordinary voting and section voting (postal, absent and unenrolled).

Implementation at the 1999 Victorian State election

There were considerable efficiencies in using one ballot paper. One advantage was that ballot paper printing was completed in record time. This reduced the number of hand-written ballot papers, as fully printed postal ballot papers were available to returning officers and postal voting officers on the Monday after the close of nominations (on Friday).
Pre-election preparation by the Victorian Electoral Commission
Pre-election preparation by the Victorian Electoral Commission

The role of the Electoral Commissioner and the Victorian Electoral Commission

The position of Electoral Commissioner is a statutory appointment made by the Governor in Council. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is the administrative agency through which the Electoral Commissioner’s statutory obligations are carried out. The Electoral Commissioner’s chief responsibility is to conduct elections for the Victorian Parliament. The responsibilities and functions of the Electoral Commissioner are independent from Government. The Electoral Commissioner is required to report annually to Parliament, and to report to Parliament within twelve months of any parliamentary election.

Election timeframe

The Victorian State election is held every three to four years. Under the Constitution Act 1975, the Legislative Assembly has a maximum four-year term and, under usual circumstances, a minimum three-year term. This provides a window of opportunity within an approximately twelve month timeframe for the Government to call an election. This situation presents a challenge to the VEC’s preparation and planning to conduct the State election as preparations must be made without knowing in advance the date the election will be held.

Staffing and infrastructure

The conduct of a State election is the culmination of three years planning and preparation by the VEC. The administrative infrastructure and large number of personnel that must be put in place immediately a State election is announced make the preparations for a State election comparable in size and complexity to those of a military operation.

The VEC operates with a small core staff of seventeen, which is supplemented by a larger number of temporary and casual staff. At the time of the State election there were some ninety full-time staff working at the VEC. In addition, contract staff are engaged to provide specialist and expert service such as IT support or election software development and advice. There were also some 16,000 people engaged by the VEC to conduct the State election in returning officers’ offices throughout the election period and in polling places on election day.

There are a large number of operations required for the State election that require the expertise of external service providers. The contracting of external service providers allows VEC staff to focus on their election-specific areas of expertise. It also ensures that Victorians are provided with the best quality election service, using the latest technologies and systems to achieve the successful conduct of the State election.

Prior to the window of opportunity for the 1999 State election to be called, the VEC entered into contracts with a range of specialist service providers. Each contractor was selected after a competitive tendering process, taking into account the quality of their service, competitive costs and value for money.

Contracted services for the State election include:

- information technology;
- election advertising;
- public relations;
- telephone enquiry service;
- printing;
• cartage and courier;
• tally room construction;
• election staffing;
• payroll; and
• mail-house.

Electronic management of the 1999 Victorian State election

The use of information technology (IT) to provide information and services in a fast and efficient manner is now commonplace in the community. There is now an expectation by all the VEC’s key stakeholders that IT be used to facilitate the election process. In view of this, the VEC has continued to look at ways of improving services using IT and has developed election-specific software to manage databases and streamline what were once cumbersome and time-consuming manual processes.

This resulted in the VEC’s new, electronic election management system – EMS 2000 – to assist with the conduct of the State election (as well as future Council elections).

EMS 2000 is an integrated election management system that was used by all returning officers and the central administration at the State election. For the first time, all the information needed to conduct the State election was collected in a single database. Information was entered at the returning officer’s office and was replicated to the central server located at the VEC. The information in the central database was subjected to rigorous quality assurance processes that ensured that the State election was conducted efficiently and in accordance with legislative requirements.

A major feature of EMS 2000 is that it integrates a number of functions that were previously handled separately. The main functions managed by EMS during the State election were:

**Resourcing**

EMS 2000 calculated the type and quantity of office equipment, stationery, voting materials and staff required by each of the fifty-four returning officers’ offices, and for each of the 1,616 polling places on election day.

**Candidates’ nominations**

Returning officers entered nominations into EMS 2000 as they were received from candidates. This information provided the data for:

• printing seven million ballot papers;
• advertising for the State election;
• answering enquiries from the media and political parties;
• publishing on the VEC’s website; and
• constructing the VEC’s tally board for election night.

**Ballot draw and printing of ballot papers**

Returning officers used EMS 2000 to conduct the random draw for candidates’ positions on ballot papers. The resulting data was used to print the ballot papers for each electorate in the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. In the past this draw had been conducted by drawing numbers out of a barrel.

**Postal voting**

Applications for postal votes were recorded in one central location at the VEC. The VEC received 134,454 applications during the State election. Successful applicants were sent their ballot material. Unsuccessful applicants received a rejection letter and a new application form. Returned postal votes were processed through EMS 2000, which recorded postal voters as having voted.

**Registration of how-to-vote cards**

Victorian legislation requires that how-to-vote (HTV) cards handed out on election day be registered with the VEC. EMS 2000 provided a central registry of HTV cards, which allowed the VEC to provide timely and definitive responses to enquiries about HTV cards.

**Election results**

On election night, results were entered into EMS 2000 by returning officers. The results were transmitted in real time to the media, to the tally room for printing and posting on the tally board, to the VEC’s website and to the parliamentary registered political parties.
Payroll

EMS 2000 was used to calculate the payroll for all 16,000 staff and polling officials employed during the short period of the election.