Services to registered political parties and candidates
Information services to registered political parties and candidates

Providing election stakeholders and participants with information that is accurate and easy to use helps the VEC meet its objective of providing the highest quality election services.

Prior to the earliest possible date of the State election, the VEC conducted briefing sessions for registered political parties on the election process. The sessions provided information on the VEC’s preparations for the election, changes to legislation, the role of election managers, postal voting arrangements, nomination procedures, the registration of how-to-vote cards, the VEC’s voter information campaign, complaints procedures and public funding of election expenses.

Those attending were also provided with maps showing the location of election managers’ offices, early voting centres and election day voting centres. Representatives from eight of the ten registered political parties that contested the election attended these sessions.

A State election information kit was subsequently provided to all members of parliament and registered political parties.

Information to candidates

The VEC provided handbooks and manuals to candidates during the State election. All information materials provided to candidates and scrutineers had been updated to incorporate feedback received following the 1999 State election and to reflect changes to legislation and electoral boundaries.

Election managers provided the information materials to independent candidates. The VEC provided the candidate’s kit to the political parties to distribute to their endorsed candidates.

Election support services

Register of political parties

The Electoral Act 2002 requires the VEC to establish and maintain a register of political parties.

In order to qualify for registration a political party must, at the time of registration, have a written constitution and at least 500 members who are Victorian electors and party members in accordance with the party’s rules, and not members of another registered political party or of a party applying for registration.

It is not compulsory for political parties to be registered to contest an election but registration gives a party a number of important entitlements. These include:

- the right to have the party’s name on ballot papers;
- a requirement to nominate candidates and an option to register how-to-vote cards centrally with the VEC;
- access to enrolment and voter information on a periodic basis; and
- public funding of election expenses.

There are 15 registered political parties in Victoria, ten of which contested the 2002 election. (See Appendix 13.)
Support for the nominations process

The VEC advertised for nominations in all daily newspapers throughout Victoria on the day after the writ was issued. Election managers provided prospective candidates with a candidate's kit that included:

- the appropriate district or province nomination form;
- a Candidate’s Handbook;
- a Guide to scrutineers at State elections leaflet;
- a Registration of how-to-vote cards in State elections leaflet;
- a how-to-vote card declaration form;
- a list of voting centres for the relevant district or province;
- a district or province fact sheet;
- the election manager’s contact details;
- key election dates; and
- details on the number of issuing points at each voting centre in the district or province and an estimate of the number of votes expected to be cast.
Election managers offered to meet with each candidate as soon as possible after the acceptance of the candidate’s nomination in order to outline the election process and clarify any other matters.

At the 2002 election registered political parties were required to submit their nominations to the VEC. These were processed and loaded directly into the VEC’s election management system.

The close of nominations was 12 noon on 14 November 2002 for registered political parties, and 12 noon on 15 November for other candidates.

Candidates

The VEC received a record 477 nominations for the 2002 State election, eclipsing the previous record of 444 candidates in 1992. In 1999, 406 candidates contested the State election.

There were 372 candidates for the 88 Legislative Assembly (Lower House) districts and 97 candidates stood in the 22 Legislative Council (Upper House) provinces.

In addition, four candidates nominated to contest each of the Upper House by-elections in East Yarra and Western provinces.

The increase in the number of candidates was due to the large number of candidates nominated by registered political parties at this election. The Australian Greens contested 106 of the 110 electorates (26 in 1999), the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party stood candidates in all 110 electorates (Labor 108, Liberal 100 in 1999) and the National Party nominated 22 candidates (15 in 1999).

Sixty-five candidates stood as independents, compared with 78 at the 1999 election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidates</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male candidates</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female candidates</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party candidates</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent candidates</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most candidates</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least candidates</td>
<td>3 (25 districts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes simultaneous by-elections

The registration of how-to-vote cards

Registered how-to-vote (HTV) cards are the only form of printed electoral material that can be lawfully handed out, distributed or otherwise made available within 400 metres of a voting centre on election day.

The Electoral Act 2002 allows political parties to register their HTV cards with the VEC and for other persons or organisations to register their HTV cards with the election manager for the electorate in which they wish to distribute HTV cards.

Information about the registration of HTV cards was provided to:

- registered political parties at briefings held prior to the State election; and
- candidates in the kit provided by election managers.

The key dates for the registration of HTV cards at the 2002 State election were:

- submissions by registered political parties to the VEC – between 16 November and 12 noon, 23 November 2002; and
- submissions by other candidates and organisations to election managers – between 18 November and 12 noon, 21 November 2002.
Provision of electoral rolls to candidates
Each candidate in the 2002 State election was provided with a copy of the electoral roll for the relevant electorate on disk. Additional instructions and software were also provided to make the file suitable for use in a mail merge.

Nomination by Dr Robert Dean
On Wednesday, 13 November, the Liberal Party nominated its candidates for the Victorian State election with the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), including a nomination by Dr Robert Dean to be the Liberal Party candidate for the electoral district of Gembrook.

When the VEC receives nominations it checks the enrolment register to confirm that candidates are enrolled as at the close of roll for the election.

Section 44 of the Constitution Act 1975 specifies that a person is qualified to be elected as a member of parliament if, at the close of roll for the election, the person is enrolled and is entitled to vote.

Section 70 of the Electoral Act 2002 provides the grounds under which a candidate’s nomination may be rejected. One of the grounds for rejection is that the candidate is not enrolled to vote at the close of roll for the election.
### Figure 4 – Funding of election expenditure at the 2002 Victorian State election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total candidates</th>
<th>Candidates eligible for funding</th>
<th>Entitlement paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>$3,423,844.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens Electoral Council</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$3,016.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Party</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Democrats</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$6,313.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Labor Party</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Party</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>$2,507,563.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Party*</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>$326,671.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Alliance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian Greens*</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>$376,588.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,825.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumming, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,906.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamberlain, K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,028.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davies, S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$8,416.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George, A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,860.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelman, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$6,154.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,373.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingram, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$16,702.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nesbitt, K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,681.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyett, J</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,638.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platschinda, B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$5,679.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reilly, B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,007.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savage, R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$20,054.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sayers, T</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,394.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonogan, R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,660.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toll, G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,174.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbury, J</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,546.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whelan, L*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$12,047.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>373</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$6,743,149.59</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Australian Greens, National Party and L. Whelan spent less than their entitlement.
Public funding of election expenditure

The Electoral Act 2002 provides for the public funding of election expenses incurred by registered political parties and candidates contesting Victorian State elections.

Registered political parties and independent candidates that receive four per cent or more of first-preference votes are entitled to $1.20 for each first-preference vote received.

In the case of a candidate endorsed by a registered political party, payment is made to the registered officer of the relevant political party. In the case of a candidate not endorsed by a registered political party, payment is made to the candidate.

Payment is dependent upon the VEC receiving an audited Statement of Expenditure (SOE) and an audit certificate that states that the auditor received full access to information and has no reason to believe that any matter in the SOE is incorrect.

Where the audited SOE shows that no less than the entitlement has been spent, payment is calculated at $1.20 for each first-preference vote received. Where the SOE reveals that an amount less than the entitlement has been spent, payment is for the amount specified in the SOE. A summary of the returns is presented in Figure 4.

The deadline for applications for the funding of election expenses was 19 April 2003. The VEC made payment of the entitlement within 30 days of receipt of an audited SOE.

The VEC’s performance in providing services to registered political parties and candidates

The VEC engaged Sweeney Research to conduct interviews with representatives of five registered political parties and a survey of candidates. The feedback from these election stakeholders and participants will be used to assist with the evaluation of the VEC’s management of the 2002 election and the planning of future elections.

Services to political parties

Sweeney Research conducted interviews with representatives from the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party, the National Party, the Australian Greens and the Australian Democrats. Interviews took place in February 2003.

Overall, the political parties were satisfied with the management of the election and the services provided by the VEC and the Electoral Commissioner. The VEC was seen as an efficient organisation that had improved its services since the 1999 election.
Major findings included:
- the Electoral Commissioner and VEC staff were commended for their professionalism, helpfulness and the quality of the information they provided;
- all political parties complimented the VEC’s communications campaign, describing it as “excellent”, “recognisable, extensive and effective”. The choice of a theme and the consistency of the message were also praised;
- the electronic lodgement of nominations was considered more convenient and to have worked well, although it was suggested that the amount of information requested should be reviewed;
- changes to the postal voting system were regarded as improvements that generally worked well, though some concerns were raised by the parties about delays experienced by voters awaiting the delivery of postal voting material;
- most of the parties would like to see the number of early voting centres increased; and
- the counting of votes was considered to have gone well, and the counting of postal votes on election night was seen as a positive improvement. Some criticisms were made regarding delays posting progressive results to the VEC website.

The VEC did not receive any formal complaints from registered political parties about its performance during or after the election.

Services to candidates
In February 2003 Sweeney Research conducted a telephone survey of 71 randomly selected candidates who had contested the 2002 State election. The sample included 31 successful and 40 unsuccessful candidates who had stood as either independents or as representatives of a political party.

The quota of 40 successful candidates was not achieved because some potential respondents declined to participate in the research. As a result members of parliament, including ministers, were under-represented in the survey.

Overall 93% of all candidates were satisfied with the VEC’s management of the election (54% were very satisfied, up from 22% in 1999).

Other significant results included:
- 93% rated the candidate’s information kit as effective or very effective in providing them with useful information about standing as a candidate;
- 30% of candidates were dissatisfied with the processing of postal votes (down from 72% in 1999), because they believed that some voters did not receive ballot papers in sufficient time to vote;
- 91% were satisfied with the operation of voting centres;
- 79% of candidates were satisfied with the management of early voting centres. Of the 11% who were dissatisfied some thought there were too many centres, while others believed there were not enough;
- 76% were satisfied with the operation of mobile voting services (up from 60% in 1999);
- four in ten candidates felt services to voters with a disability and voters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds needed to be improved. However equal numbers of respondents were satisfied with the services provided by the VEC to these voters;
• 83% of candidates were satisfied with the counting of votes; and
• the performance of the VEC’s election managers was rated very highly by candidates. All candidates (100%) said that election managers acted impartially at all times, 97% were satisfied with the responses to enquiries provided by election managers, and 95% were satisfied with the way election managers processed nominations.

Complaints about candidates
During the course of the State election, the VEC received 49 complaints about political parties or candidates.

Twenty-two complaints related to the inclusion of postal voting applications in campaign material sent by political parties and candidates. Complainants alleged that the campaign material and postal voting applications distributed by the Liberal Party were too similar in appearance and style to electoral information posted to all electors by the VEC prior to the announcement of the election.

Under the Electoral Act 2002 (s.101), organisations and individuals other than the VEC are able to reproduce postal voting application forms and include them with campaign materials.

The VEC will hold further discussions with political parties regarding this issue.

The majority of the remaining complaints received by the VEC related to the failure of candidates to appropriately authorise electoral material or alleged that material was misleading.

Where a complaint regarding the authorisation of material was upheld, the election manager asked the candidate to appropriately amend the material.

No complaints regarding allegedly misleading material were upheld. Previous court decisions have determined that electoral advertising is only misleading when it acts to mislead or deceive an elector in relation to the actual casting of their vote. Most election comment, however, does not come within the scope of Victoria’s electoral law, as it does not refer to the manner in which a person will mark their ballot paper.

No prosecutions resulted from any of the written complaints lodged.
Complaints by candidates about the VEC’s conduct of the State election

A total of ten complaints were received from candidates or their supporters regarding the VEC’s conduct of the 2002 State election.

Four were about postal voting and are discussed in the following chapter, Services to voters.

Other complaints related to VEC advertising, the location of voting centres, services provided at voting centres, and voting procedures.

Recommended service improvements

The VEC will further improve election services delivered to political parties and candidates at the next State election.

Communication with political parties and candidates

Following the 2002 election, representatives of some political parties noted that they would prefer to receive information from the VEC about legislative changes, changes to procedures, service initiatives and other information well before the start of the election. With the introduction of fixed-term elections this will be possible.

The VEC will also publish the election information kit well in advance of the start of the election and will nominate an officer as a primary contact during an election, to ensure that communication between the VEC and political parties and candidates is more effective.

Postal voting applications

The VEC received a number of complaints about the postal voting applications distributed by political parties at the 2002 election. Primarily these related to the appearance of the application and the privacy of information provided by electors on their applications.

The VEC will discuss the appearance and distribution of postal voting applications with political parties prior to the next election.

The VEC also believes that it is important to ensure that postal voting applications comply with privacy principles and legislation. At future State elections people completing a postal vote application should therefore be asked if they wish to have the party’s how-to-vote material sent to them. The VEC recommends legislative change on this matter.

Election hotlines

Election hotlines operated by some political parties during the 2002 State election caused confusion among some voters. To minimise confusion in the future, the VEC will ask political parties to clearly identify that their advertised hotline is run by the party, and is not the VEC’s number that voters should call for election information.

Election results

As requested by political parties, the VEC will provide registered parties with the official results for each electorate immediately following the declaration of the election.