Enrolment

Recoding electors following the redivision of electoral boundaries

In March 2002 the VEC completed the recoding of the 3.2 million electors on the enrolment register to take account of the new electoral boundaries. All changes to the enrolment register were validated using geographic information provided by Land Victoria.

Enrolment initiatives in the lead-up to the 2002 State election

Encouraging 17- and 18-year-olds to enrol

In the lead-up to the 2002 State election the VEC, in conjunction with its advertising agency Grey Worldwide, developed and implemented a highly-targeted campaign to encourage young Victorians to enrol. Those eligible to vote for the first time were a particular focus of the campaign.

The VEC identified that approximately 150,000 young Victorians were eligible to vote for the first time at the 2002 State election, yet statistics showed that less than two-thirds of 17- and 18-year-olds were enrolled. The theme of the campaign was: Turning 18? There’s heaps you can do when you turn 18. Like vote!

Seventeen-year olds are a focus of enrolment campaigns as they can enrol provisionally and vote at 18.

The VEC placed advertising, including an enrolment form, and published an article encouraging students to enrol in Stuff magazine, which was distributed free-of-charge to all Year 12 students in September 2002. The advertisement was later adapted into a postcard for distribution in cafés and cinemas throughout Melbourne and parts of regional Victoria in late October, just prior to the announcement of the election.

An on-line enrolment campaign to encourage 17- and 18-year-olds to enrol in the lead-up to the election was developed and implemented as a trial. This four-week campaign used the same Turning 18? theme and ran during October and the first week of November.

By placing advertising on the NineMSN and Yahoo networks this campaign was able to specifically target users of these sites who were aged 17-20 and living in Victoria. A range of advertisements appeared on sites across both networks. Users who clicked on the advertisements were directed to a specially designed web page that contained information about enrolling to vote and an enrolment form for download.

The trial of on-line enrolment advertising was limited in scope but the results suggested that although young people are reportedly high-volume users of the internet the inability to enrol on-line reduced the overall effectiveness of the campaign. Additionally, anecdotal feedback suggests that on-line advertising is still seen by many users as ‘wallpaper’. Of the 448,047 advertisements served, 627 users clicked through to the enrolment page and 127 of these downloaded an enrolment form.
Enrolment confirmation mail-out

Changes to State electoral boundaries announced in October 2001 by the Electoral Boundaries Commission meant that more than 1.1 million Victorians would vote in a different electorate at the next Victorian State election.

In August and September 2002 the VEC sent an enrolment confirmation card to each of Victoria’s 3.2 million electors to advise them of the electorates where they were enrolled to vote and to confirm their enrolment details.

It was decided that a card should be sent to all electors, not just those affected by the boundary changes, to avoid confusion and to encourage electors to keep their enrolment up to date prior to the State election.

The card encouraged electors to check that they were correctly enrolled. Those who needed to update their enrolment were asked to complete and return the enrolment form attached to the card.

As a result of this mail-out almost 100,000 electors updated their enrolment details. This was the first time that the VEC had direct mailed all enrolled electors.
Removal of electors from the enrolment register
A large number of enrolment confirmation cards were returned to the VEC as ‘return to sender’ mail. As a result, the VEC sent 34,316 elector records to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) for objection processing in accordance with Federal and Victorian electoral law.

The AEC reviewed the list and sent 29,347 letters of objection. (This letter informed the elector of the AEC’s intention to remove the elector’s name from the enrolment register if they did not respond within 28 days.) A small number of electors did respond, but 27,169 electors were removed from the enrolment register as a result of the objections process.

Changes to electoral legislation affecting enrolment
Under the Electoral Act 2002, Victorians must be enrolled at their principal place of residence to be eligible to vote. The new legislation means that people who have changed their principal place of residence more than three months before election day without updating their enrolment are not permitted to vote at that election.

In early October 2002, the VEC launched a two-week advertising campaign to alert voters to the legislative change and to encourage them to update their enrolment. The enrolment campaign comprised advertising in all Victorian daily newspapers and on commercial radio stations across the State.

As a result of this campaign the VEC processed some 1,900 enrolments a day – five times the usual number – in the last two weeks of October.

Other ongoing enrolment initiatives
To maintain the accuracy of the enrolment register on an ongoing basis the VEC has developed a range of strategic programs to help Victorians to enrol or update their enrolment. The VEC sends enrolment brochures to:
- Victorians when they turn 17 and become eligible to provisionally enrol; and
- electors who have changed their address and need to update their enrolment details.

Sending an enrolment brochure to electors prompts people to act when they might otherwise be inclined to delay enrolling or updating their enrolment until an election is called.

The VEC has ongoing enrolment partnerships with 10 organisations. In 2001-2002 the VEC collected 94,744 enrolments through its strategic enrolment programs and partnerships.

Close of roll
Once the State election was announced on 4 November 2002, eligible electors had four days to ensure they were on the electoral roll and that their enrolment details were correct. Under new electoral law the deadline for enrolment was extended from 6.00 pm to 8.00pm on the close of rolls day.

The VEC was successful in having television and radio advertisements aired throughout Victoria within hours of the announcement of the election and full-page newspaper advertisements printed during the week, ensuring that as many people as possible took the opportunity to check that their enrolment details were correct.

Voters were able to update their enrolments on the spot at 72 election offices throughout the State pick up an enrolment form at any Coles supermarket or post office or download a form from the VEC’s website. At this election, electors were able to fax enrolment forms to the VEC for the first time, as well as post or hand-deliver the form.

The VEC processed 21,158 new enrolments and 34,003 enrolment updates in the four days before the enrolment deadline. At the close of rolls at 8.00 pm on Friday, 8 November 3,228,466 people were enrolled to vote in the 2002 election, compared with 3,130,338 at the 1999 State election. (Appendix 2 contains details of province and district enrolments at the close of roll.)
Voting

Arrangements for voting before election day

The VEC made arrangements for voters who could not get to a voting centre on election day. A total of 318,198 Victorians voted before election day. This represented 10.6% of all votes cast, and is an increase on the number of votes cast before election day at previous State elections.

At the 1999 State election 276,780 votes were cast before election day (9.5% of all votes) and at the 1996 State election there were 177,361 (6.3%).

This increase may have occurred because some political parties encouraged postal voting by mailing postal vote application forms to many electors at the start of the election period and also because changes to legislation enabled the appointment of a larger number of early mobile voting centres. Increased awareness of services may also have encouraged more people with commitments on election day to vote beforehand.

Early voting centres were open for two weeks prior to election day, from Monday, 18 to Friday, 29 November. In addition to business hours, these centres were open late on Thursday, 28 November and on Saturday, 23 November in recognition of the needs of members of the community requiring the opportunity to vote outside business hours.

In most cases the election manager’s office was considered to be appropriately located for the purposes of voting prior to election day. However, an additional 26 voting centres were established to supplement election managers’ offices, including at Melbourne Airport.

The use of laptop computers at all early voting centres enabled voters to cast their ballot without having to complete a declaration envelope, making voting much quicker.

There were 163,712 votes cast at the early voting centres prior to election day.

Early mobile voting

The Electoral Commissioner has the power to appoint certain institutions as early mobile voting centres to enable electors in those institutions to vote on the spot when a mobile polling team visits in the lead-up to a State election.

Prior to the 2002 State election, the VEC conducted a review of the election services provided to institutions that were appointed as special hospitals at the 1999 State election. The VEC contacted these institutions (and others) to ask what type of electoral services would best meet their residents’ requirements. Most institutions contacted requested a visit from a mobile voting team during the election.

Voting in person

Voting in person was possible at any of the 79 early voting centres throughout the State prior to election day. These locations are listed in Appendix 3 of this report.

Early voting centres were open for two weeks prior to election day, from Monday, 18 to Friday, 29 November. In addition to business hours, these centres were open late on Thursday, 28 November and on Saturday, 23 November in recognition of the needs of members of the community requiring the opportunity to vote outside business hours.

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There were 878 mobile voting centres appointed for the 2002 State election, compared with 471 locations in 1999. Under the Electoral Act 2002 the VEC is able to appoint a larger range of institutions as early mobile voting centres than was possible under previous legislation.

There were 22,179 votes cast at mobile voting centres during a two-week period prior to election day, a substantial increase on the 11,611 votes cast at the 1999 State election.

Voting at interstate and overseas locations
Voting was possible prior to election day at 12 interstate and 35 overseas locations. These locations are listed in Appendix 4 of this report.

A total of 8,205 votes were cast outside Victoria during the State election. This compares with 17,692 votes cast at the 1999 votes State election and 9,945 votes at the 1996 State election. Unlike 1999, the 2002 election was not held during school holidays when more voters are likely to be interstate or overseas.

Voting by post
Voters who would not be able to vote at a voting centre on election day were able to vote by post by:

• picking up an application from any post office in Victoria;
• downloading a postal vote application from the VEC’s website;
• telephoning the VEC’s telephone enquiry service and having an application form posted to them; or
• using an application form provided by a political party.

At this election, postal vote applications were scanned and processed electronically, which eliminated labour-intensive handling of paper applications and helped to ensure the efficient delivery of ballot papers to electors. The VEC’s election management system also enabled election officials and hotline staff to track all applications and inform electors of the status of their application.

When ballot papers were returned, declarations were able to be quickly checked against the electors’ signatures contained on the scanned image of the postal vote applications, removing the need to sort through thousands of forms to validate the signatures, as happened in the past. This improved processing system meant that most postal votes were included in the count on election night for the first time. (In the past all postal votes were counted in the days following the election.)

During the nine days of postal voting the VEC processed a record 170,000 applications for postal votes, which represents an extraordinary effort during a very small timeframe.

However, the VEC received a number of complaints from electors and political parties regarding the apparent non-delivery of some postal votes. (Electors who contacted the VEC because they had not received their postal voting material were sent a replacement by Express Post, where time permitted).

All postal vote applications were processed on the day they were received. However, the VEC does not have total control of the postal voting process, and Australia Post remains an important partner in the postal voting system.
The VEC will continue to work with Australia Post as part of its review of the election in order to identify strategies for improving the delivery of postal votes. At the next election the VEC is considering using a specific type of ‘Express Post’ for the delivery of all postal voting material. This will enable the VEC and Australia Post to track postal voting material from the time the VEC process an application through to delivery to the post office.

**Registered general postal voters**

Voters who satisfy certain statutory requirements regarding their ability to vote at a voting centre at election time are eligible for registration as general postal voters.

By registering as a general postal voter, electors automatically receive ballot papers in the mail for all State elections.

There were 31,243 registered general postal voters at the 2002 State election. This is a significantly greater number than at previous State elections (17,452 in 1999, 9,587 in 1996).

The increase was mainly due to legislative changes prior to the 1999 State election increasing eligibility for registration, and initiatives by the VEC and the Australian Electoral Commission to increase public awareness of this facility amongst voters who find it difficult to vote at voting centres.

**Figure 7 – Registered general postal voters at Victorian State elections 1992 - 2002**
Antarctic voting
An 'Antarctic elector' is an elector who has made a request under the Electoral Act 2002 to be treated as an Antarctic elector while employed in Antarctica.

At the 2002 State election there were seven Antarctic voters.

Arrangements for voting on election day
Voting took place between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm at 1,655 voting centres throughout Victoria on election day, Saturday, 30 November 2002.

The resourcing of voting centres was a major challenge. Figure 8 shows the scale of this task. The VEC recycles all paper products following an election.

Figure 8 – Materials printed for the 2002 State election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballot papers</td>
<td>25,320,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms and manuals</td>
<td>324,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot boxes</td>
<td>7,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardboard voting compartments</td>
<td>23,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral rolls</td>
<td>16,831</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voters were able to vote at a voting centre within their electorate (cast an ‘ordinary vote’), or vote at any other voting centre in the State outside their electorate by casting an ‘absent vote’.

A total of 2,689,140 votes were cast on election day. These included 230,516 absent votes (226,608 at the 1999 State election and 203,908 at the 1996 State election).

Voting centres were established mainly in schools and community halls selected by election managers during preparation for the election. Where possible, buildings with wheelchair access were selected as voting centres, within the constraints of an election – the date of the election is not known in advance, the very short election timeline and the fact that electoral authorities do not own the buildings used as voting centres.

An accessibility audit of venues selected as voting centres was conducted and all centres were classified according to recognised national accessibility standards.

Voting centre locations were advertised in all major Victorian newspapers on election day, published on-line and were also available through the VEC’s telephone enquiry service.

Electronic marking of the roll
The use of 390 laptop computers at all early voting centres and 49 election day voting centres made the processing of votes cast outside the electors district faster and simpler. This innovation allowed election officials to confirm a voter’s enrolment on an electronic electoral roll, removing the need for subsequent authentication and allowing the vote to be automatically included into the count.

Improving services for voters with a disability
Following the 1999 State election, the VEC conducted a review to assist with further improving access to electoral services and information for voters with a disability. In 2001 the VEC developed a Disability Action Plan following consultation with organisations representing people with a disability in Victoria.

A number of initiatives were introduced at the 2002 State election improving access to electoral information and voting. These included:

- customised election information for people with special needs was distributed through established community communication networks;
- a text telephone (TTY) was installed to help people with hearing impairment to communicate with the VEC and easily obtain election information;
- election officials were trained to recognise the special needs of people with disabilities and to provide appropriate assistance;
- magnifying tools and large user-friendly pencils were available at all voting centres and early voting centres; and
an accessibility audit of all venues used as voting centres was conducted. Following the audit all voting centres were, for the first time, classified according to recognised national standards as having either full wheelchair access, access with assistance or no wheelchair access.

The VEC advised prospective candidates and political parties of these service enhancements prior to the election.

The VEC also provided tabletop voting screens at all voting centres and instructed election officials to assist electors with a disability if requested.

Services for voters with a visual impairment
At the 2002 Victorian State election the VEC established as a trial special early voting centres at four Vision Australia premises (Kooyong, Essendon, Bendigo and Ballarat) to enable people to cast an early vote using a range of specialised tools available at the centres.

At the centres, voters were able to use:
- braille ballot paper templates, enabling people with vision impairment to vote unassisted;
- closed circuit television and electronic magnifiers to enlarge text on the ballot papers;
- enhanced lighting; and
- special pencils for better grip.

The early voting centres were open from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm from Monday, 25 to Friday, 29 November. These centres were managed and operated by Vision Australia employees and volunteers who were familiar with the needs of vision impaired voters. All staff undertook a modified version of the VEC’s training programme.

The VEC closely monitored and provided support to each of the centres during the election. Close links were also established between each of the Vision Australia voting centres and the local election office.

The number of votes cast at the four Vision Australia early voting centres were:
- Kooyong 238
- Essendon 135
- Bendigo 168
- Ballarat 232

As part of the review of the 2002 election the services provided to voters with a disability, including the trial at Vision Australia, will be evaluated and opportunities to further improve services examined.

Assistance for voters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
At voting centres located in areas with large numbers of voters from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, election managers sought to employ multi-lingual election officials.

The VEC employed 522 multi-lingual election officials on election day who were able to assist voters and answer enquiries in their community language.

At all voting centres information about how to cast a formal vote was displayed in 16 languages on a large poster.
Communication services
Beginning on 4 November 2002, the day the election was announced, the VEC implemented an extensive communications campaign to increase public awareness, understanding and participation in the 2002 Victorian State election.

The campaign had four specific objectives:
• encourage electors to enrol or update their enrolment;
• inform electors about how and where to vote;
• minimise informal voting; and
• maximise voter participation at the election.

The communication campaign developed and implemented by the VEC relied on advertising, public relations, publications, an election hotline and the VEC’s website to inform Victorian voters about election services and arrangements.

The campaign communicated the following key information:
• election dates;
• how to enrol;
• how to become a candidate;
• how to vote before election day;
• how to register how-to-vote cards;
• the names of candidates;
• how to cast a formal vote;
• where to vote on election day; and
• summary election results and the names of successful candidates.

State election advertising campaign
Following a competitive tendering process Grey Worldwide was appointed to develop and manage the implementation of the advertising campaign for the 2002 State election.

The theme of the campaign was ‘Every vote will shape Victoria’, which emphasised the collective effect of voting and the value of every vote.

‘Claymation’ was the central visual device used to illustrate this theme. In each of the television advertisements a piece of clay was gradually shaped by a group of hands and through this collective effort it evolved into different forms representing rural Victoria, Melbourne and eventually a map of Victoria, as the words ‘Every vote will shape Victoria’ appeared on screen.

The advertising campaign for the 2002 State election comprised television, radio, internet and newspaper advertisements. The advertisements all used the campaign theme and imagery and were focused on key electoral messages appropriate to the five phases of the election. Extensive advertising appeared in Victorian metropolitan, regional and ethnic media.

Images from the advertising campaign were also incorporated into VEC publications and used at the tally room on election night. A full list of where the VEC placed advertising during the election is provided in Appendix 5. Samples of the press advertising appear in Appendix 6.

Figure 9 – Advertising spending by media*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>On-line</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$826,495</td>
<td>$363,756</td>
<td>$780,401</td>
<td>$34,500</td>
<td>$2,005,152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Placement costs only.

The VEC’s communication campaign included specific strategies developed to provide election information to electors from culturally diverse backgrounds, electors with a disability and young electors. Activities and materials were designed to ensure these electors received information to help them understand and participate in the election. (More information about targeted communication services appears below.)
Advertising in rural Victoria
As with previous State elections, the VEC ran a full range of advertising on regional television and radio and in eight regional newspapers. In addition, the VEC placed advertisements in 65 country newspapers for the first time (but not suburban newspapers). These advertisements informed voters how to vote before election day and where to find more information about where to vote on election day.

Some small country newspapers considered this advertising insufficient. They criticised the VEC and were unwilling to publish election information useful to voters contained in the VEC’s media releases.

The VEC engaged independent media strategists to ensure that media selection was effective in ensuring that key election information was communicated to voters throughout Victoria, while ensuring best value for public money.

Research conducted after the election found that awareness of the VEC’s advertising and key election information was higher in regional and rural Victoria than in Melbourne.

The VEC will review its advertising arrangements and media selection policy prior to the next State election.

Information services for voters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
To assist voters from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds the advertising campaign for the 2002 State election included advertisements in 16 ethnic newspapers and on seven ethnic radio stations (see Appendix 5 for details). Information was advertised in a total of 12 languages. The proportion of the voter information campaign budget spent on ethnic advertising was seven per cent, above the five per cent minimum required by government policy.

A telephone interpreting service for electors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds was also provided during the election. Advertising in both the ethnic media and in the English language press referred people to this service.

VITS Language Link was engaged to provide multi-lingual telephone and translation services. The service had 12 language-specific telephone lines and an additional line for other languages.

Callers dialling a language-specific number heard a message in their own language on the subject of their choice, such as enrolment or how to vote correctly. If the caller needed more information they were put through to an interpreter, who in turn connected to the VEC’s mainstream telephone enquiry service for a conference call.

Over the 25-day election period the multi-lingual enquiry service received a total of 988 calls, 463 of which were connected to an interpreter.

Figure 10 – Advertising spending in regional media*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$110,429</td>
<td>$71,290</td>
<td>$96,260</td>
<td>$277,979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40% 26% 35%

*Figure 10 includes only advertising in rural and regional media and excludes the cost of advertising in statewide media.

Figure 11 – Ethnic advertising spending by media*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$97,074</td>
<td>$43,768</td>
<td>$140,842</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

69% 31%

*Ethnic advertising constituted 7% of media spending.
Information services for visually impaired electors

In conjunction with Vision Australia the VEC provided information to visually impaired electors on audiocassettes and in braille and large print documents. These materials were distributed to disability organisations, libraries and individuals.

Advertising on 3RPH (Radio Print Handicapped) and a successful public relations campaign were also implemented to support and publicise services for vision-impaired voters. A representative from Vision Australia was interviewed by WIN Television and the Electoral Commissioner was interviewed on 3RPH about the services for visually impaired voters trialled by the VEC at this election. Articles about the service were published in metropolitan and regional daily newspapers.
Telephone enquiry service

The election hotline was again outsourced at this election as the VEC does not have the ongoing telecommunication infrastructure nor the staff necessary to operate a call centre to deal successfully and efficiently with the large volume of calls that occur during a State election.

Tenders were invited from potential contractors to operate the telephone enquiry service as a specialised call centre. Pracom Pty Ltd was the successful tenderer.

The national ‘13 13 16’ number operated from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm, Monday to Saturday, to provide information and assistance to electors.

The telephone enquiry service answered 96,779 calls during the election period (compared with 67,945 in 1999). Up to 80 trained consultants were available to answer calls. The VEC provided all operators with information to enable operators to answer questions regarding:

- how and where to enrol;
- how and where to contact an election manager and to nominate as a candidate;
- the location of interstate and overseas voting centres;
- how to vote by post or in person before election day;
- the location of early mobile voting centres; and
- how and where to vote on election day.

Using this system, operators were able to access information on their computer screens to ensure that all telephone enquiries were answered quickly and accurately. Calls that were outside the scope of the data on the customer service operators’ computers were escalated to team leaders. Any enquiry requiring a more detailed interpretation of the electoral content was referred to a VEC representative on the floor and, if necessary, the enquiry could be transferred to the VEC’s head office for final resolution of the matter.

All State election advertising publicised the 13 13 16 hotline number.

VEC website – vec.vic.gov.au

Election information required by voters and candidates was available on the VEC’s website, which was updated for the State election.

Electoral profiles including maps and statistical data were available on the site, along with key election dates, and enrolment and postal voting application forms.

The website also contained specific information relevant to each phase of the election:

- Pre-nomination period – a progressively updated list of candidates’ names and phone numbers, details about how to enrol and the deadline for enrolling.
- Post nomination period – a complete list of candidates in ballot paper order, and information on how and where to vote.
- Election day – information about where to vote.
- Election night - progressive results for each district and province updated as votes were counted.
- Post election – progressive and final results for each district and province, the names of elected candidates and the state of the parties.

Information for students and teachers

In October the VEC published the second edition of its teacher resource kit, Your opinion counts – young people and voting. This resource for teachers explores the themes of human rights, democracy and the right to vote, and is designed to foster an ongoing interest in the political process. It also incorporates new classroom activities and discussion topics.

Your opinion counts was distributed to all co-ordinators of Studies of Society and Environment in each secondary school in Victoria in October 2002. One of the modules in the kit was an activity sheet that helped students follow the State election.
Compulsory voting enforcement

The enforcement of compulsory voting at Victorian State elections is governed by the Electoral Act 2002.

Compulsory voting enforcement was managed at the VEC’s central processing centre. Following the election electoral rolls were scanned to identify the names of electors who appeared not to have voted.

In early February 2003 the VEC sent a failure to vote notice to 143,943 electors. The notice requested that people either provide a reason for not voting; explain how they voted; or pay the $50 penalty.

Regrettably some electors were sent a failure to vote notice when they had in fact voted. The VEC quickly indentified the cause of this error and the voters affected. These voters were sent a letter apologising for the mistake and asked to ignore the failure to vote notice.

Electors who fell into certain categories were not sent failure to vote notices. These included those who had provided a valid and sufficient excuse to election managers or the VEC during or after the election, and electors who were over 70 years of age or deceased.

Figure 13 – Compulsory voting enforcement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total voters enrolled</td>
<td>3,228,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total votes counted</td>
<td>3,007,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electors who did not vote</td>
<td>220,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to vote notices sent</td>
<td>143,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines paid</td>
<td>$239,815</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As at 22 April 2003.

The non-payment of penalties for failure to vote has been a continuing problem. Under the Electoral Act 2002, the processing of non-voters who fail to pay the penalty may be handled through the PERIN system (Penalty Enforcement by Registration of Infringement Notice) and the penalty for not voting has been increased from $40 to $50. At the time of writing it is too early to see if these changes have resulted in any improvement in the payment of fines.

Figure 14 – Voters excused for failing to vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious reasons</td>
<td>11,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent from Victoria</td>
<td>17,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant, overseas or Antarctic elector</td>
<td>28,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimed to have voted</td>
<td>9,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other valid excuses</td>
<td>1,267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The VEC’s performance in providing services to voters

Enrolment

A record number of Victorians responded to the VEC’s call for enrolments in the lead-up to the 2002 State election.

Between August 2002 and the close of the roll on 8 November more than 265,000 Victorians enrolled to vote or updated their enrolment, which meant that the VEC processed 100,000 more new or updated enrolments than in the lead-up to the 1999 election.

Voter participation

Voter participation and informal voting rates are useful indicators of the health of an electoral system. It is important to note, however, that these may be affected by factors other than the services provided by an electoral authority including interest in the election, election issues, the geography and the demographic composition of the electorate and even the weather on election day.

Communications campaigns produced by the VEC at parliamentary elections seek to maximise voter participation and reduce informal voting by providing Victorians with all the information they need to participate fully in an election.

Voter turnout at the 2002 State election was 93.16%. This was comparable with the 93.23% recorded at the 1999 State election and 94.1% recorded in 1996.

Informal voting

The rate of informal voting at the 2002 election was 3.42%, compared with 3.02% at the 1999 State election. The rate of informal voting in 2002 was very close to the long term average for Victorian State elections (3.10 per cent for the seven elections held since 1982.)

The increase may be due to the record 477 candidates contesting the 2002 election. At this election every electorate had at least three candidates, compared to the 1999 election where in 29 electorates there were only 2 candidates.
Evaluation of election services

The VEC engaged Sweeney Research to conduct surveys of voters following the 2002 State election. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate satisfaction with the services provided by the VEC to assist voters during the election.

The research commenced on election day, Saturday, 30 November 2002, and comprised 600 interviews with voters (including 200 face-to-face interviews at voting centres on election day and 400 telephone interviews with voters immediately following the election). Face-to-face and telephone interviews were also conducted with absent, early and postal voters to evaluate the election services provided to them. The sample included voters from Melbourne and regional and rural Victoria.

A small survey (50 respondents) of voters who used the special early voting centres trialled at Vision Australia was also conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of candidates</th>
<th>Number of electorates 2002</th>
<th>Number of electorates 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voting before election day

Seventy-three per cent of those surveyed who voted before election day and recalled seeing advertising by the VEC felt it was effective in providing information about the election.

Postal voting

The inability to attend a voting centre, due to a disability or illness, was the main reason for lodging a postal vote. Over a quarter (27%) of those who lodged a postal vote did so because of a disability, and close to one in five (19%) voted by post because of illness. These findings were consistent with the 1999 survey results.

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the efficiency of the postal voting system. Nearly two thirds (65%) were ‘very satisfied’ with the service and over a quarter (27%) were ‘satisfied’. The proportion of postal voters who were ‘very satisfied’ with the provision of ballot papers had increased from the previous election (57% in 1999).

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the information provided about how to complete a postal vote. Most voters (88%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the service.

Early voting

Nearly a quarter of voters (23%) who attended an early voting centre did so because they expected to be outside their electorate on election day. Over a third of early voters were either on an interstate holiday (18%) or business trip (18%).

Nearly all early voters (97%) were either very or quite satisfied with their experience at the voting centre.

Nearly all voters (95%) were very or quite satisfied with the efficiency and helpfulness of staff at the early voting centre.

Most early voters (88%) did not need to queue at the centre before voting.
Suggested improvements

Respondents were asked whether there were any ways in which voting before election day could be improved. Nearly three quarters (74%) said the process did not require any adjustments and 6% were unsure.

Those who voted at an early voting centre were more likely to suggest that the process required improvement than those who lodged a postal vote. Suggestions included increasing the number of early voting centres and providing more information about their location. Some voters wanted to be able to vote using the internet.

Voting on election day

Nine in ten voters (90%) were either very or quite satisfied with their experience at a voting centre on election day. The main reasons voters regarded voting as positive included the efficiency and helpfulness of staff, because voting was quick and easy, and the centre was well organised.

Nearly all voters (95%) were very or quite satisfied with the efficiency and helpfulness of staff at the voting centre.

Less than half (47%) of all voters had to queue before they received their ballot paper. The average waiting time for those who did queue was approximately three or more minutes.

Respondents were asked how they knew where to vote. Over half (56%) voted at the same voting centre as at previous elections and 16% had seen the VEC’s supplement in the newspaper on election day. This suggests more effective advertising of voting centres is required.

Suggested improvements

Four in ten voters (40%) believed that the VEC did not need to improve how voting was managed at State elections. Suggestions for improvements included providing more information about how and where to vote, offering a greater range of voting methods (including the internet), and establishing more voting centres on election day.

Four per cent of electors were dissatisfied with the operation of the voting centre they attended, and wanted more signage outside the centres and more staff to reduce the length of queues.

Voters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Voters from the Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and Vietnamese speaking communities were surveyed by Cultural Partners Australia, in conjunction with Sweeney Research. Fifty face-to-face interviews were conducted on election day and a further 170 telephone interviews were conducted in the week following the election.

Three quarters (76%) of those who were aware of the VEC’s election advertising had seen the advertisements on television (in English). Smaller numbers saw the advertisements in ethnic press (32%) or heard them on ethnic radio (26%).

Approximately two-thirds of respondents (63%) felt that the VEC advertising campaign was either very or quite effective in providing them with information about the election.
The majority (57%) of respondents indicated that there was no additional information that they would have liked to receive. However, 26% would have liked to receive additional information. Topics suggested included: preferential voting (84%), responsibilities of the State government (84%), and how voting determines seats in parliament (79%). These responses vary significantly from those of English speaking voters.

For the majority of voters (75%) the experience at the voting centre was positive.

Few respondents (17%) required assistance from another person while voting. Those respondents requiring assistance relied on a family member or friend (71%) or an election official (21%).

Very few respondents (15%) were aware of any information in languages other than English at the voting centre, suggesting the VEC needs to reconsider its efforts in this area.

**Vision Australia voting centres**

Sweeney Research conducted a total of 50 face-to-face interviews with visually impaired and special needs voters at each of the Vision Australia early voting centres located at Kooyong, Essendon, Bendigo and Ballarat.

Nearly all respondents (96%) were satisfied with their experience of voting at the centre.

Three quarters (74%) of voters thought that voting in this election was ‘a lot easier’ when compared to voting on previous occasions and a further 10% found it ‘a little easier’.

Over half (54%) of the respondents were satisfied with the experience because staff were helpful. Forty-four per cent of voters were satisfied because the centre was convenient or made voting easier (42%).

Most users of the centres (68%) were made aware of the service by Vision Australia staff, others heard advertising on 3RPH (8%) or received an audiocassette containing election information produced by the VEC and Vision Australia.

Two thirds of voters (64%) lodged their vote at a Vision Australia Centre because it was convenient. One in five (22%) chose to vote at the special voting centre because they offered facilities for the vision impaired such as braille templates and 16% wanted to ensure their vote was private.

Using a hand-held magnifier (18%) and carer assistance (18%) were the methods most commonly used when voting. The braille ballot paper template was used by 16% of voters. One in five respondents (22%) did not require the use of any special voting aids.

Respondents aged 18 to 39 years were more inclined to use the braille templates (80%). Users of the braille ballot paper template had to be able to read braille and tended to be totally blind.

All respondents had voted at State or Federal elections previously. Only 30% of voters had been able to cast a secret ballot at a previous election, while 68% had previously required assistance.

**Outcome**

The centres enabled the VEC to improve electoral services for people with special needs, particularly the elderly and people with disabilities by using Vision Australia’s specialist expertise, premises, adaptive technology and client networks. The strategy of partnering with a peak service provider, such as Vision Australia, proved to be very successful and the trial has demonstrated that the strategy has considerable potential for expansion in the future.
Effectiveness of advertising

Over three quarters of voters (77%) recalled seeing or hearing advertising informing voters about enrolling to vote, where to vote or what to do if away from home on election day. Advertising awareness was up slightly from the 1999 survey results (74% in 1999).

Advertising awareness was highest amongst males (79%), those aged 25 to 54 years (81%) and in regional/rural Victoria (79%).

Television continues to dominate as the main source of election information. Over two thirds of voters (69%) had seen or heard information about election services on television, 51% had seen advertising in newspapers and 34% heard the VEC’s radio advertising.

Three quarters (74%) of those who saw election advertising felt it was either very or quite effective in providing information about the election.

Of those who rated the VEC advertising as ineffective in providing information on election services and arrangements, over a quarter (28%) thought themselves already well informed of the requirements at a State election and did not require any additional information.

Only 17% of voters said there was more information related to the election that they would have liked to receive. Of these, 60% required more information on where to vote on or before election day, 36% were interested in the responsibilities of the State Government and 31% in how voting determines seats in Parliament.

Use of the VEC’s website

Between the announcement of the election and 1 December 2002 (the day after election day) the VEC’s website received 3.9 million hits from 94,225 distinct users (compared to only 32,989 users at the 1999 election).

There were 10,919 enrolment forms and 15,206 postal vote applications downloaded from the website.

On election day there were 1.12 million hits from 12,000 users.

During the election the VEC’s website received hits from Taiwan, South Africa, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Four in ten (43%) surveyed voters were aware that the VEC had a website containing information about election services and arrangements and 8% had used the website (up from 1% in 1999). Of those who used the website to access election information, 75% found it to be very or quite satisfactory.
Effectiveness of the election hotline

A record number of calls was received and answered at the telephone enquiry service during the 2002 State election (see Figure 17), and flexible staffing arrangements allowed staff levels to be adjusted to meet peak demand.

The vast majority of calls were simple questions about enrolment or voting arrangements:

- 11,769 (11%) calls were made on 8 November, the day the roll closed (three times the volume of calls on the same day at the 1999 election); and
- 11,877 (11%) calls were received on the day before election day as voters sought more information about where to vote on election day.

The overall increase in the number of calls received may be partly attributed to a more successful advertising campaign; but may also be the result of changing community behaviour, whereby people are used to calling a hotline if they have an enquiry.

Many callers had enquiries about matters which were already clearly set out in advertising and, as Figure 18 shows, the number of calls received increased immediately following the publication or broadcast of advertising.

Of voters surveyed, over a third (39%) were aware that the VEC had an election hotline where voters could access more information about the election. Of those aware of the hotline, only 6% had used the service, compared to 3% in 1999.

Over two thirds (69%) of those who had contacted the enquiry hotline were very or quite satisfied with the service and information they received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Number of calls received</th>
<th>Number of calls answered</th>
<th>Left after information message</th>
<th>Abandoned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>129,774</td>
<td>99,743</td>
<td>24,833</td>
<td>5,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>71,696</td>
<td>67,945</td>
<td>3,392</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Complaints about services to voters

The VEC received a total of 51 written complaints about its services to voters, which are summarised below.

Postal voting
Sixteen complaints were received from voters who applied for a postal vote but did not receive ballot papers. In each case, the VEC explained the arrangements it had in place for the daily mail out of ballot papers. (See the section on postal voting earlier in this chapter for details.)

Enrolment
Four complaints were received about the implementation of the ‘three month rule’.

On 1 September 2002, the Victorian Parliament passed a new law that meant people who changed their permanent address more than three months before election day without updating their enrolment were not permitted to vote.

The VEC conducted a print and radio advertising campaign in October to highlight these changes. Furthermore, following the announcement of the State election on 4 November, the VEC conducted a high-profile enrolment campaign on metropolitan and regional television to remind Victorians of their responsibility to ensure that their enrolment was up to date.

Privacy
Three complaints were received regarding the privacy of information provided by voters on their postal vote applications. Electoral law provides that registered political parties may write to voters offering a postal vote application.

A new process for the return of postal vote applications distributed by political parties was implemented at this election to remove the possibility of delay in the issuing of ballot papers. At this State election political parties were asked to include the VEC’s return address envelope with their postal vote applications so that completed applications were sent directly to the VEC, rather than to the political party as occurred at previous elections. The VEC then provided political parties with the names and address of those who applied for postal votes using a form provided by the party.
The procedures employed at this State election complied with the **Electoral Act 2002**. In regard to Victoria's privacy legislation, the VEC weighed up the public's interest in receiving information to assist them with their vote against their right to privacy. It was considered that when people apply for a postal vote on a form provided by a political party (as opposed to a form provided by the VEC) they could reasonably expect to receive a how-to-vote card from that party.

To this extent the process applied at this State election was comparable with the practices of the past. Nonetheless, the VEC considers that it would be prudent at future State elections for parties to ask people completing a postal vote application whether they wish to have the party's how-to-vote material sent to them. The VEC will review this procedure in consultation with political parties.

**Other complaints**

Fifteen complaints were received about voting facilities and access to voting. These included complaints about the location of voting centres and the conduct of staff.

Other complaints received related to advertising (five), alleged inconsistencies in the electoral roll (three) and five general complaints about the conduct of the election.

**Best practice workshop: an analysis of election day voting services**

In early 2002 the VEC and the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) agreed to jointly participate in a range of best practice projects to identify alternative ways of delivering improvements to electoral services.

At the 30 November 2002 Victorian State election, representatives from the WAEC worked with the VEC to observe first-hand the delivery of electoral services and the operation of voting centres on election day.

It is at voting centres that election stakeholders are most likely to notice and benefit from service improvements.

Practices and procedures are modified from election to election, but many changes are difficult to implement due to external constraints, for example the unknown date of the election and the fact that electoral authorities do not own the buildings used as voting centres.

Following is a summary of the observations made in the best practice study on election day. The study's recommendations are included on the following page.

**Location and signage at voting centres**

The location of voting centres does not generally change at elections as there are only a limited number of suitable buildings available and frequent changes of location would lead to voter confusion. However, changes do occur from time-to-time due to unavailability or unforeseen circumstances.

It was noted that:

- Establishing voting centres in locations where people go as a part of their usual routines, for example adjacent to shopping centres or on main roads, makes the centre more visible and voting more convenient.
- Informing voters of the location of voting centres remains a challenge. The ‘State election guide’ published as a lift-out in newspapers on election day was not as visible as anticipated, while other voters had sought out where-to-vote information prior to election day.
- The external signage at the centres visited did not easily identify the venues as voting centres. Larger and clearer signage outside all centres would make it easier for voters to find a voting centre.
Staff
The relative competence of voting centre managers was clearly reflected in the way the centres were managed and operated. The more experienced managers were able to quickly identify and respond to voter needs, provide assistance to staff or improve the functioning of the centre.

The primary concern of staff, particularly first-timers, was the limited amount of training received. Most would have preferred more training and that it had occurred before election day.

Voters with special needs
The primary difficulty encountered by voters from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities was understanding the instructions for voting on the ballot paper, in particular the requirement to number all the squares (in accordance with the preferential voting system).

Although multi-lingual staff were on hand at some voting centres, voters were not informed of their availability. More consideration must also be given to employing multi-lingual election officials where there is a particular language need and publicising the availability of the service.

The multi-language posters provided to all voting centres were sometimes not on display or were poorly positioned. It is unlikely that these were seen or used by voters.

Recommended service improvements
Continuous improvement and the introduction of four-year fixed-terms will allow the VEC to make a number of improvements to services at the next State election.

‘Super-centres’
The VEC will consider establishing a number of multi-service voting centres for early and election day voting. These would be established in large modern venues to better serve the needs of voters, particularly those with special needs.

These ‘super-centres’ would vary in size and could offer a range of specialised voting services for disabled and vision impaired voters and also be staffed by multi-lingual election officials.

These centres, and their specialised services, would need to be heavily promoted and established in high-profile locations close to public transport in central Melbourne and regional centres.

Voting centres
• Ensure that the most suitable venues are available as voting centres by making bookings in advance. The criteria used to select voting centres will also be reviewed in relation to disabled access.
• The increased use of signage at voting centres would improve access for voters. Large, highly visible signs should be more prominently displayed outside all voting centres. The use of directional signage inside the centres should also be increased.
• Signage indicating the availability and location of parking, where available, and additional signs to reserve parking for the disabled adjacent to voting centres should also be displayed.
• Informing electors in rural electorates of the location of voting centres, particularly where the location has changed, remains a challenge. In rural electorates voters tend to vote at the same place at each election and information about changes to the location of voting centres is more effective if it is provided directly to rural electors.
• The naming of voting centres is an issue in some areas. Voting centres are named for the general area that they serve and the name of the centre is retained from election to election to enable comparative analysis, even if the location of the centre changes. The names of voting centres will be reviewed prior to the next election to minimise voter confusion.
Voters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

- Improve the recruitment and placement of multilingual election officials to ensure staff are employed at voting centres where required.
- Strategies to inform voters of this service both before and on election day will have to be investigated. For example, advertising in the ethnic media should contain information directing voters to specific voting centres providing services in community languages.
- Information about voting correctly needs to be provided directly to voters in their community language. This information could be issued by election officials or information could be displayed in each voting screen.

Voting in rural areas

- Electors who live more than 20 kilometres from a voting centre are eligible to become registered general postal voters. The VEC will publicise this option more widely in rural Victoria.
- The VEC will investigate the possibility of early mobile voting in rural areas. Well-patronised mobile libraries service many rural areas, and the VEC could develop a mobile voting program using a similar framework. This would require legislative change.

Postal voting

- An ‘Express Post’ system will be used to ensure the timely delivery of postal voting material.

Communication services

The State election communication campaign will again be reviewed, with a particular focus on the following areas:
- the development of a comprehensive strategy to increase enrolment and voter participation in areas where these are particularly low;
- new strategies will be developed to keep the electoral roll up-to-date and to reduce the rush to enrol once the election is called;
- the strategy used to inform voters of the location of voting centres, including how voters are informed of changes to the location of voting centres. The liftout published in newspapers on election day was not as visible or as effective as anticipated;
- the communication of election information to rural voters; and
- the VEC’s website will be redeveloped to improve access to information.

Election managers’ offices

Election managers often find it difficult to lease suitable temporary office accommodation that meets the accessibility standards required for an election office because it is often difficult to secure a short-term lease on commercial property.

It is unlikely that the introduction of fixed-term elections will make it easier for the VEC to lease short-term office accommodation as landlords prefer long-term leases. This contrasts with voting centres, which are usually public buildings that can be leased for one day as required and can be booked well in advance.

In cases where the election manager’s office is not well located or is unsuitable for voting the VEC will consider establishing an additional early voting centre that better meets the needs of voters.

Training of staff

Once an election begins election managers are responsible for training and recruiting the staff employed in their offices, as early voting officials and as voting centre managers. The introduction of fixed-term elections will allow election managers to recruit staff before the election begins and provide more comprehensive training.

Compulsory voting

The implementation of flexible payment options including on-line, credit card and BPAY to make the payment of non-voter infringement notices easier will be investigated.