7. Sample newspaper features

**Voting information mailout**

SUNRAYSIA voters should check their letterboxes over the next two weeks for information on changes to the Upper House and their EasyVote card, says Victorian Electoral Commissioner, Steve Tully.

The Statewide mailout will inform voters of changes for the November 25 election, which includes a fixed election date, 40 Upper House members to be elected every four years, and proportional representation as the method of vote counting for the revamped Upper House ballot papers.

“When voting, electors will receive a large Upper House ballot paper. It will resemble a Senate ballot where they have a choice of voting above or below the line. The key difference is that if they choose to vote below the line, they need to choose at least five candidates.”

The EasyVote card will list the voter’s electoral details and the district and region for which they will be voting.

“It is possible to vote without the card, but it may take longer.”

“Of course, if you’re not enrolled, you can’t vote.

“So those who haven’t enrolled before should do so and those who have moved should update their details.”

A new initiative this year will be an online voting centre look-up facility available from the formal start of the election campaign on October 31.

Through the VEC’s 13vote.com.au State election website, voters will be able to enter their address or the address in Victoria they will be on election day and the nearest five voting centres will be listed. An icon will then enable the voter to view that address on a map, if they are unfamiliar with the area.

“Our aim has been to increase accessibility to voting and making it easier to find the voting centre is a good start.

“This new facility will also enable voters to list and find early voting centres and also E Centres, which will accommodate electronic voting for the vision impaired.”

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**Vote for Victoria push under way**

By MATHEW MURPHY

THE message was there everywhere you looked.

But in case you missed it, two elastic performers in white bodysuits conveyed it through an impresive dance. Play-Doh was handed out, and a giant inflatable map of Victoria and a smaller edible version made of ookie dough helped reinforce the point.

For those gathered at Federation Square for the Victorian Electoral Commission’s voter information launch who were still left in the dark, comedian Hamish Blake provided help.

“If you missed the symbolism of the Play-Doh it is so each one of you can shape Victoria just like each vote will shape Victoria,” he said.

All Victorians on the electoral roll will get a letter this month telling them of changes to Victoria’s upper house as part of the campaign launched yesterday.

The redefining of the boundaries has created eight new regions, each with five elected representatives.

A move to Senate-style proportional representation has lowered the number of votes needed to get elected.

Victorian electoral commissioner Steve Tully said people who were still unsure about the changes can use a hotline, which has been set up at 13VOTE (1300 803) or through the Internet on 13vote.com.au.

Year 12 students will get a Z-Card, which provides facts about voting, and an enrolment form.

Electronic voting will be available for the first time with six centres set up so those with vision impairment can vote anonymously.

The centres will be in Ballarat, Kooyong, Shepparton, Horsham West, Warragul and Melbourne Town Hall.

Victorians have until 9pm on Tuesday, November 7, to enrol or update their enrolment.
Early birds beat the rush of poll fever

ON THE TRAIL
JONATHAN GREEN

IF MYER can open its Christmas window on November 11, there's no reason why Victorians shouldn't start voting for the 2006 election on November 13. Which they did.

Never mind that the two major campaigns have only just been launched, never mind that King on a fortnight of fevered television lies before us: voting began yesterday at 77 designated early voting centres across the state.

It could be that the decisive votes in the coming poll have already been cast, though if the result mirrors an exhaustive exit poll of two voters leaving the city's Lower Town Hall polling place just after lunchtime yesterday, it will be a draw.

Which will consolde the ALP and Liberal campaign workers who braved the polar extremities of Swanston Street to distribute how-to-vote cards, though it may also disappoint the rather earnest woman from the Socialist Party, but then one suspects that in the current political milieu, disappointment is very much her lot.

There was quite a throng at the Town Hall booth through lunchtime, people either obliged to vote early due to an impending absence or inconvenience, or those simply keen to get their affairs in order and avoid the queues and sausage sizzles of November 25.

It is also possible to vote early for no good reason. Not strictly legal perhaps, but possible: for while the counter staff will ask you whether you will be able to attend a booth on November 25, they require no proof that you won't.

So if you are the sort of person whose Christmas shopping is already wrapped and tagged, the sort of person who may see last-minute fluctuations in stamp duty policy will be of no moment, then this could be just the option.

You can vote for any Victorian electorate at any early voting centre, by following the simple instructions displayed in the booth. For example: "Put the small ballot paper in the ballot paper box marked small." Which makes almost as much sense as its companion: "Put the large ballot paper in the ballot paper box marked large."

Yesterday also marked a first in the technology available to visually impaired Victorian voters, who will be able to vote solo for the first time using specially developed computer technology available at six "E centres"—snappy shorthand for electronic voting.

The Lower Town Hall is one, and so it was that at 3.10pm yesterday Melissa Howie of Deer Park was able to enter an electronic booth accompanied only by her guide dog Davina and for the first time in her voting life cast her secret ballot in secret.

"I'd class myself as a swinging voter," she said, giving nothing else away. Which might be enough to knock the Lower Town Hall exit poll right off its axis.
Disenfranchised homeless get the vote

By ANDREW FENTON

TWENTY-THOUSAND homeless Victorians are now eligible to vote in state and council elections following changes to the electoral act.

The new rules enable people with no fixed address to vote, provided they have a close relative on the electoral roll.

The Victorian Electoral Commission bombarded shelters and support agencies with enrolment forms over recent months in an effort to sign up voters in the lead-up to the state election.

But VEC communications manager Sue Lang said that only a relative few were likely to vote on November 25 because the scheme was still in its infancy.

"Some people think that because they haven't enrolled and voted previously they may be fined," she said. "We've tried to assure them that's not the case."

Ms Lang said that everyone deserved to be able to vote.

"It's a wonderful initiative that ensures everyone has their franchise regardless of whether they have a home address to vote from," she said.

Homeless man David Clancy said he welcomed the changes and had been encouraging his mates to enrol.

"People are in situations that can change on a daily or weekly basis but we still read the paper, we still know what's happening," he said.

St Mary's House of Welcome (165 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy) will host a free barbecue and voting day on November 17 from 11am to 2pm.

"Approximately 80 per cent of homeless people have a mental illness so they may have a great deal of anxiety about going to an actual centre," Ms Lang said.

"We thought what might be less intimidating for them was to organise a mobile voting location and St Mary's is the ideal centre because it's quite central."

St Mary's social worker David Ring said he jumped at the chance to get involved.

"It's something we thought was really important and we wanted to get our guys involved," he said. "We've signed up 15 people and 10 of them have never voted before."

He said his clients had a good understanding of the issues that affected them.

"They certainly understand the IR laws and the breaching stuff. They may express it in a very different way but they are across the issues."

Streets and community organisations that would like VEC officers to assist their homeless clients to vote should call Sue Lang on 9299 0730.
Koori vote plea

Julia Irwin

ABORIGINAL electoral officer Nicole Cassar is urging indigenous Australians living in Darebin to make their vote count.

Ms Cassar is based at the Northcote election office in High St and will be at Kingsbury Primary School’s polling station on November 25 to encourage and help indigenous people to vote. She is one of six Aboriginals the Victorian Electoral Commission has employed to increase indigenous participation in the state election.

A commission research report in June this year found a significant percentage of indigenous people were not enrolled and of those enrolled a “large majority had little interest or did not intend to vote”.

The report blamed the low vote on a lack of indigenous candidates and understanding about the electoral processes.

Ms Cassar, a Kingsbury resident, said indigenous people often felt intimidated by the electoral process.

“My role is a bit like an interpreter,” she said.

“For a long time our vote didn’t count (indigenous Australians got the vote after the 1967 referendum), which makes it more important that we should have our say. Voting gives us equality and is a way we can show we care and have an interest in the future development of the state.”

Ms Cassar said participating in the political process was more important for indigenous people after the Federal Government dissolved the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission last year transferring indigenous programs funding to mainstream departments.

“I would encourage all Kooris young and old to vote and if not enrolled, make sure you’re enrolled so you can vote next time,” she said.

Ms Cassar will be at the election office at 192 High St, Northcote, on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday this week.

More election coverage on Pages 12 and 13.
Anatomy of a state election

Compiled by BEN HAYWOOD

ENROLLING TO VOTE

All year the Victorian Electoral Commission works to keep the electoral roll up to date. Every teenager entitled to vote celebrates on their 18th birthday with an enrolment form so that they can vote as soon as they turn 18.

In the lead-up to an election, everyone on the electoral roll is contacted to confirm their enrolment details. Advertising campaigns encourage those who have never enrolled to do so and those who have moved to update their details.

MAPPING

Everyone votes based on the district and region where they live. The Electoral Boundaries Commission reviews the boundaries according to legislation to make sure there is about the same number of people in each district and the same number of people in each region. This ensures that everyone is equally represented and everyone’s vote has the same value.

At August 2006, the average number of voters per district was about 400,000. The average number of voters per district was about 38,000.

VOTING CENTRES

On election day there will be almost 1700 voting centres. Staff at the VIC locates and back these sites months in advance. They include everything from school halls to leisure centres.

DISTRIBUTION

With the election office and early voting centres already elected, distribution begins from the VIC warehouse for the 1700 voting centres. The cardboard furniture and equipment flows with Australian voters and is distributed in a few days before election day.

SET UP

Electoral staff set up the voting centre in preparation for election day.

COUNTING THE VOTES

When voting closes, the count begins. Election officials - watched closely by independent scrutineers - count the votes and lodge their results with their election office, which then sends the results on to the Election Management System at head office. The process is precise. Every ballot paper must be accounted for.

CASTING YOUR VOTE

Between 8am and 6pm on election day about 3½ million Victorians cast their votes for the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly at one of 1700 voting centres across the state.
WAREHOUSE
Furniture and office equipment for the election offices - including desks, chairs, photocopiers, fax machines and computers - are organised and stored ready for distribution from the VEC warehouse in Mandurung a few months before the election.

CALL CENTRE OPENS
With the election just months away, the VEC call centre opens in Mandurung a few months before the election. It will be used to handle calls from the public about the election.

THE TALLY ROOM
As results come in from election offices across the state, the Election Management System sends updates to the tally room at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. The public, through the media and the virtual tally room on the internet, watch closely as the results flow in to the enormous electronic tally board. The results data is also fed to the media outlets covering the election.

VICTORY CLAIMED
As the night unfolds, the results become clearer. Typically one party commands an overall majority, and another claims victory before the end of the night and before every vote is officially counted.

BALLOT PAPERS
The ballot papers for the state election are designed with four districts and eight regions, that's 96 ballot papers that must be filled with candidate names and parties. There are no more than 50,000 ballot papers printed in two weeks before the election and distributed across the state, around the country and throughout the world so that Victorians can cast their vote.

THE COUNT CONTINUES
Counting continues for many days after the election weekend. Absentee votes, including those cast overseas and interstate, and postal votes are sorted and returned to their correct electorate for counting. Compiling final results continues at the computer count centre for many days until the precise results have been recorded and released.

PACK UP
Voting centres, election offices and eventually the computer count centre are dismantled and returned to storage where they will stay until the next election.
Hamish helps election campaign take shape

Messing about with playdough, comedian and FOX FM radio host Hamish Blake knows every vote this state election will shape Victoria. He joined Bec, Jake, Sarah and Georgia today to launch the state election education campaign outlining changes to the Upper House and the way members are elected. See 13vote.com.au

Picture: NICOLE CLEARY
The Age 14 November 2006

**Victoria puts blind faith in electronic voting**

By LI WRIGHT

Victoria is about to test the age of electronic voting as a voter when controversy over the United States election where democracy itself ‘buckled’.

Voters at the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) in Melbourne begin voting this week on new e-voting terminals designed for privacy and security, ahead of the state election on November 23. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) claims its machines cannot be hacked.

But there were widespread reports of e-voting problems in the US after last week’s mid-term elections. Voters across the nation described a glitch, some even called “vote-flipping”, in which votes intended for one candidate were scored for another candidate.

E-voting advocates insist these are not the result of problems with equipment but are evidence of voter error. The new EDOBO-D encryption device uses a form of unbreakable e-voting fraud, but most errors from last week were of faulty machines.

The VEC says it is confident of the accuracy of the new system, which is being rolled out in the state election.

Australia has lagged behind the rest of the world in adopting electronic ballots. A report produced by the Victorian and Australian Electoral Commissions in 2001 said the Australian preference voting system does not readily lend itself to the use of the technology deployed in the US.

It argued that proportional representation would complicate electronic elections requiring voters to rank all candidates according to preference.

But Tony Clark, manager of professional services at the Australian Electoral Commission, said he was confident about the new technology.

And while there was some concern about the need for a paper trail, the Commission is confident that the use of open source software, the independent audit of the software code, and the security built into the system, including its physical security, ensured that the system was transparent and reliable.

The VEC’s e-voting system is set up to keep all ballots secret until the last count, and to ensure that no machine can be hacked.

Since 2001, some states and cities have had their votes tabulated electronically in the US. In 2004, 28,146 electronic votes were counted at 12 pre-poll and polling day centres, representing 1.4% of the total. The system used barcodes, and votes were transmitted using eVote software, a secure LAN and remote servers.

A review of these elections by the ACT Electoral Commission gave the system a clean bill of health. “We are confident that the system has been well designed and allows for the counting of votes that is both secure and auditable,” the Commission said.

The system is also being used in the US to ensure that no machine can be hacked.

The VEC’s Mr Gribbin says different jurisdictions have had different motivations for introducing electronic elections.

“For us is the vision-impaired. In Brazil it was for the illiterate population, in other countries such as India it was to eliminate fraud, in the ACT it was to count (votes) faster,” Mr Gribbin says.

The 2002 Australian Electoral Commission report says: “Australia has always been a leader in electoral democracy. Australians need to be aware that other jurisdictions are now taking the lead on the e-voting issue.”

**Blind faith in electronic votes**

Voters have their names marked off the roll in the traditional way and receive a smart-card containing their electorate details. They insert the card into a card-reader attached to the voting terminal that sits behind a number-sealed plastic box and follow the instructions. Once a vote is cast, the card is locked and cannot be used again.

Disability groups convinced the Victorian Government of the need for the e-vote, arguing it provides the ballot secrecy afforded to able voters.

Historically, blind and sight-impaired voters have needed a helper to record their preferences.

Chris Gribbin, e-voting project manager at the VEC, says voting preferences will be recorded on a hard disk and a removable back-up USB key inside each terminal. When polling closes, the encrypted data will be burnt on to CD and transported to the central VEC office for printing.

Regional centres will transmit the data via private ADSL.

At the VEC, the data will be decrypted by two officials using individual key cards and passwords. Votes will then be printed to paper ballots and returned to their electorate centres to be counted by hand.

Australia has lagged behind the rest of the world in adopting electronic ballots. A report produced by the Victorian and Australian Electoral Commissions in 2001 said the Australian preference voting system does not readily lend itself to the use of the technology deployed in the US.

It argued that proportional representation would complicate electronic elections requiring voters to rank all candidates according to preference.

It also argued “there is no evidence to suggest that there is any political or community support for change”.

But Tony Clark, manager of professional services at Vision Australia, says vision-impaired voters have reported feeling empowered for the first time. If e-voting is good for vision-impaired people, he says, it’s good for everybody.

“It’s got great potential,” Mr Clark says. “We just need the political will. Political parties are used to counting pieces of paper. (They leave) a real trail that people can follow. They are also used to capturing people by giving them how-to-vote cards.

“They can still do that (with electronic voting kiosks) but they haven’t got their head around it yet,” he says.

The VEC’s Mr Gribbin says different jurisdictions have had different motivations for introducing electronic elections.

“For us is the vision-impaired. In Brazil it was for the illiterate population, in other countries such as India it was (to eliminate) fraud, in the ACT it was to count (votes) faster,” Mr Gribbin says.

The 2002 Australian Electoral Commission report says: “Australia has always been a leader in electoral democracy. Australians need to be aware that other jurisdictions are now taking the lead on the e-voting issue.”