Section 4

Services to the media

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Media information kit and briefings

The VEC prepared and distributed an extensive election information kit to the media, political parties, MPs, election officials and key researchers from early October 2006.

The information kit featured profiles of every Victorian electorate and included statistical data on key socio-economic indicators, changes to the Legislative Council and the Electoral Act 2002, as well as the swings required for seats to change. The kit’s shelf life extends beyond that of the State election and copies were available for purchase from Information Victoria.

Four media briefing sessions were held to specifically address changes since the 2002 State election. These included the reform of the Legislative Council (Upper House), the voter information campaign, the trial of electronic voting, computer counts, the provision of results and the process for handling complaints.

The sessions held in April, September and October, 2006, were attended by state political journalists representing major media outlets in Victoria.

Media releases and coverage

More than forty media releases were distributed during the 2006 State election to mainstream Victorian media newsrooms through AAP’s Mediamert service, Radio Release and/or directly to media outlets. In addition, over 50 community radio broadcasters were emailed media releases and audio files, and two media releases in 18 languages were distributed to 66 ethnic publications and six ethnic radio stations throughout October and November.

There was significant media coverage of a number of initiatives developed by the VEC for the 2006 election. These included television, radio and press coverage of the trial of electronic voting for vision-impaired voters (included in Section 6) and coverage of special voting arrangements for events on election day (Shepparton Springcar Nationals, Queenscliff Music Festival).

During the course of the election, representatives from the VEC were interviewed by, or provided news information to:

- ABC TV, SBS TV, Channel 7, Channel 9 and Channel 10;
- ABC Radio National, 774 ABC, SBS Radio, 3AW, 3MMM, FOX FM, GOLD FM, Nova, 3BO (Bendigo), 3YB Warrnambool, K Rock FM (Geelong), ABC regional radio stations, various community radio stations and 3RPH (Radio Print Handicapped); and
Interview topics included:
- changes to Victoria’s Legislative Council;
- how and where to enrol for the State election;
- the record number of candidates contesting the election;
- arrangements for electors unable to vote on election day;
- the trial of electronic voting for vision-impaired voters;
- arrangements for the tally room and the provision of election results; and
- the counting of votes after election day.

The tally room

Traditionally, the tally room has been the focus of media attention on election night. One television network broadcast continuously on the night of 25 November, and several others broadcast a number of live crosses during the evening.

The VEC’s preferred venue, the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre (MECC), was the only available venue large enough to cater for all the required uses – accommodation of a 20 x 9 metre tally board plus staging, television studio sets, areas for radio and print media, and seating for the general public. The electronic tally board projected results onto a screen, replacing the old physical tally board that had been used for many years.

A decision was made to continue the lease of the MECC venue after election night in order to conduct the computer count for the Legislative Council (Upper House). This decision also enabled the venue to be used for the conduct of the three Legislative Council recounts at very short notice.

The tally room cost just over $320,000 to establish and operate (excluding the cost of the computer-count process). This included venue hire, wages, security and all communication and technical costs. The media were responsible for their own set-up and operating costs.

The ABC was the only television station to broadcast live from the tally room on election night, with Nine, Seven, Ten and Sky television preferring to broadcast live intermittent crosses. Several radio stations broadcast live from the tally room. This all took place in front of approximately 180 members of the public who chose to attend to watch proceedings – down from some 550 in 2002.

Election results were updated electronically every five minutes on the tally board and the VEC’s virtual tally room on the website, as data was keyed into the VEC’s Election Management System at election offices.

Given the lowest media, party and general public attendance at the tally room to date, there is speculation over its future. Feedback from the parties and media is inconclusive as to whether to continue this service.

Section 9 of this report details service improvements in relation to media and the tally room.
Results services

The VEC introduced a new results service for the State election incorporating the electronic tally board, the VEC’s website and TV and print media requirements.

The VEC developed data files that were not only easy to download from the website, but were written in a form that could be readily programmed by all TV and print media.

The VEC published the results data files at regular intervals on the Virtual Tally Room (website) that could be downloaded by any interested party. This allowed interested parties to download data files to suit their particular needs and deadlines.

The data files included indicators for the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. Candidate information included the candidate name, affiliation (if any) and ballot paper position. No personal information on candidates was provided.

Voting locations information included the voting location name and an identifier. No address details were included.

The number of votes received by each candidate was the most important part of the data file.

The new format was tested extensively to ensure the data provided the correct results information in the correct form. Testing was initially done in-house at the VEC. This was further expanded to include the TV and print media in the lead-up to the election and culminated in a full election night dress rehearsal at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre on the Thursday before election day.

Complaints about the media

During the course of the State election, the VEC received one complaint about the media. The complaint alleged that a newspaper article was publishing a political party media release and was more akin to a paid advertisement. The VEC notified the editor of the newspaper and advised the complainant to take the matter up with the Australian Press Council.