Section 5

VEC personnel

A total of 43 Election Managers were appointed to conduct elections for 88 members of the Legislative Assembly and 40 members of the Legislative Council.
The VEC's Election Managers

The VEC has approximately 270 Senior Election Officials (SEOs) on standby, who have been recruited and trained for engagement as Election Managers during State and local government elections. All SEOs completed extensive training for the State election, which comprised home study in conjunction with a series of seminars at the VEC (one two-day seminar, one three-day seminar and a one-day briefing in late October).

A total of 43 Election Managers were appointed to conduct elections for 88 members of the Legislative Assembly and 40 members of the Legislative Council. Some Election Managers in metropolitan areas were responsible for either two or three districts, while Election Managers in rural areas with larger geographic boundaries were allocated one or two districts.

The VEC trialled the appointment of metropolitan Election Managers for three districts as a means of improving efficiencies. However, experience at the November election demonstrated that, with the more complex processes for the Legislative Council, more than two districts per Election Manager is not preferred, given the workload this presents with very tight timeframes. In the future, the VEC will generally appoint Election Managers to a maximum of two districts in metropolitan and some rural areas and will only consider appointments to three districts in exceptional circumstances.

Assistant Election Managers from the VEC’s pool of SEOs were appointed to assist each Election Manager. At least two Assistant Election Managers were appointed for each office. The Assistant Election Managers also completed the VEC’s training program, but did not attend the final briefing in October.

The Election Manager’s role is to establish offices and appoint staff to facilitate the smooth running of the election for their electorates. They issue early votes, process independent candidates’ nominations, organise the draw for the order of the candidates’ names on the ballot papers, appoint and train voting centre staff, and make arrangements for establishing voting centres for election day. On election day, the Election Manager is responsible for the conduct of the election and the counting of votes for those electorates for which they have responsibility.

Immediately following election day, Election Managers checked, sorted and despatched completed ballot material to other electorates, finalised payroll tasks for election officials and conducted counts for postal, early and other declaration votes.
The Election Managers also supervised the checking of region ballot papers and despatched those marked ‘below-the-line’ and those determined to be ‘informal’ to the central computer counting venue at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre.

Where preference distributions were required for electoral districts, Election Managers conducted a full recheck of ballot papers and conducted the preference distribution. A total of 49 preference distributions were conducted for districts. One recount was conducted for the district of Ferntree Gully.

Support for the VEC’s Election Managers

Principal Election Officers

Five Principal Election Officers (PEOs) provided support to the VEC’s Election Managers throughout the election. Located at the VEC’s Melbourne office, the PEOs were the central point of contact between the Election Managers, the Electoral Commissioner and other VEC staff. They assisted Election Managers with procedural and other complex issues.

Helpdesk

Seven Helpdesk operators provided support to Election Managers. Principally, they assisted the Election Managers with the operation of the VEC’s Election Management System and other technical issues.

Election Liaison Officers

In addition, Election Managers were able to appoint Election Liaison Officers (ELO) who visited voting centres on election day. The ELO’s role was to alert the Election Manager to instances where voting centres may have needed extra resources and deliver them where appropriate, and to ensure procedures were applied consistently.

Appointment of staff at election offices

Election Managers were responsible for recruiting administrative staff to work in their offices. To assist them in this task, the VEC developed job specifications to assess potential candidates and to ensure that Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) principles were considered in the selection of all staff. A recruitment company was also engaged to assist with the recruitment of suitable staff who were employed on a casual basis. The company was provided with job specifications to ensure that staff recruited met the VEC’s requirements. Many Election Managers in areas with large numbers of people from culturally diverse backgrounds appointed multilingual staff where possible.

Appointment and training of election officials

Election Managers were also required to recruit staff for voting centres on election day and give preference to those who had worked at previous elections and/or applied to the VEC prior to the election.

A fixed election date allowed Election Managers to conduct more training for election officials than had previously been possible. Election Managers conducted a three-hour training session for their ELOs, Voting Centre Managers (VCMs) and Assistant Voting Centre Managers (AVCMs). In addition, all Declaration Issuing Officers were required to attend a one-hour training session.

The VEC developed a standard training package, which included a Powerpoint presentation and practical activities, and arranged hire of projectors to assist Election Managers with their training. This ensured that training sessions were conducted in a professional and consistent manner across the State.

Two 30-minute training DVDs were produced to provide an overview of voting centre procedures, with an emphasis on good customer service. One version was for ELOs, VCMs, AVCMs and declaration issuing officers. The other version was for all other election officials.

Voting Centre Managers and ELOs evaluated the work performance of all election officials, in order to determine their suitability for future employment. These details provided the VEC with a strong database repository for future elections.

Some Election Managers found it quite difficult to recruit staff for voting centres and to cover the other staffing requirements on election weekend. The VEC will consider additional promotions to assist Election Managers to find suitable staff in future.

Measures to ensure impartiality

In 1995, the VEC obtained an exemption under the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 so as to be able to employ only those personnel who were not engaged in political activities.

This enabled the VEC to advertise and appoint suitable, politically-impartial staff. The exemption applies to the appointment of people working at the ‘front line’ during State and local government elections, including Election Managers and election officials.

No legal proceedings alleging bias by Election Managers or election officials in the conduct of their duties for parliamentary elections have been lodged in the last 12 years.
Neither have the VEC, its Election Managers or election officials been involved in any breach of the Equal Opportunity Act in relation to any employment matter in the last 16 years.

Payment of VEC personnel

The payroll system used for the payment of all election staff, including election officials employed at the State election, was administered by the VEC’s Finance and Budget Branch. Employee data was contained in the Election Management System.

The VEC maintained records in the Election Management System to ensure that obligations regarding employment records were met, and to assist with any enquiries received from employees.

The payroll system ensured that the 14,811 election officials who worked at the State election were paid within two weeks of the election.

The system also provided for the production of group certificates and special reports for the VEC.

Occupational health and safety considerations

All Election Managers completed a training session in Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S). The training covered awareness of items such as Victorian OH&S legislative requirements, hazard identification, risk assessment and control strategies in the workplace.

The debriefing sessions with Election Managers, as well as complaints received from voting centre staff, highlighted the long and intensive working hours (particularly on election weekend). Long hours were also required within head office in order to meet timelines.

In future, the VEC will generally restrict the number of districts allocated to Election Managers to two districts per manager. In rural areas where distance is a significant factor, one-district offices will apply. The VEC has not ruled out the establishment of a three district office, although this would only occur in exceptional circumstances.

Although the VEC increased the number of staff in the voting centres from 2002, further increases in staff numbers will be required in 2010. The additional staff will address queues, but also reduce the number of staff required to work long and intensive hours on election weekend. These service improvements are outlined in Section 9.

Staff feedback

As part of the evaluation of the State election, the VEC conducted debriefing sessions with Election Managers throughout the State.

The feedback received from Election Managers often provides a useful perspective on the VEC’s delivery of election services and leads to improvements.

The feedback received following the 2006 election was wide-ranging and included rural and metropolitan Election Managers. This feedback has been included in the preceding chapters and summarised in Sections 9 and 10 of this report.

The VEC engaged Colmar Brunton Social Research to survey 210 electoral officials about the training and support they received from the VEC. The results indicated a high level of satisfaction.

Nearly all (96%) respondents stated that they had received a training manual from the VEC; 87% of those were satisfied with the manual and 86% completed the questions at the back of the manual.

The VEC sent a training DVD to election officials; 82% of respondents reported receiving a DVD; 82% of respondents used it; and 76% of users considered the DVD to be effective in preparing them for their role. Reasons given for not using the DVD were that the respondent did not own the required equipment, that they did not get around to viewing it, or that they felt they did not need additional information. Some 40% of respondents attended a face-to-face training session, and 80% of attendees considered the session effective. Overall, three-quarters of respondents felt that they were adequately prepared for their role, the main reasons for this positive feedback being that the VEC’s training material was helpful, that they had done the job before, and that the job was straightforward. Respondents who felt that they were not adequately prepared for everything mentioned such aspects as the declaration voting process, wheelchair access for disabled people, the confusion of people who had moved, and the unexpectedly long day at work.

The great majority (85%) of respondents were satisfied with the support they received from their Election Manager or Voting Centre Manager, while 3% were dissatisfied. Election officials were also surveyed about their perceptions of the services provided by their voting centre to voters, and 88% were satisfied with those services.