Section 6
Electronic voting
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Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of countries have provided electors with the opportunity to vote electronically. In May 2005, the Victorian Parliament’s Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee published a report on *Victorian Electronic Democracy*, which included recommendations for allowing electronic voting in Victorian elections for certain groups, and the continued monitoring of internet technologies for potential voting applications.

In December 2005, the Acting Attorney-General requested that the VEC “report to me the question of whether implementation of a trial of electronic voting kiosks to assist voters to have a secret ballot at the 2006 Victorian State election is feasible. This referral requires the Commission to undertake the necessary research to ensure that appropriate software and hardware is developed and tested.” In July 2006, the *Electoral and Parliamentary Committees Legislation (Amendment) Act 2006* was passed by the Parliament. This allowed for the introduction of electronic voting at the 2006 State election.

A budget allocation of $750,000 was made in the election budget.

The intention of this section of the report is to report to Parliament on the development and implementation of electronic voting at the 2006 State election and to respond to the Acting Attorney-General’s request. Future applications of electronic voting, including a response to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee’s recommendation that the VEC review the appropriateness of remote voting via information and communication technologies, are covered in Section 10 of this report.

Background

A number of forms of electronic voting have been trialled around the world, including internet voting, telephone voting and voting at stand-alone kiosks at voting centres. Within Australia, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has offered electronic voting facilities at voting centres at its last two elections.

The VEC has been monitoring the development of electronic voting solutions for a number of years. The VEC, in collaboration with the AEC, published two reports on electronic voting following visits to observe electronic voting in the USA and UK: *Electronic Voting and Electronic Vote Counting – a Status Report (2001)* and *eVolution not revolution – Electronic Voting Status Report 2 (2002)*. Both reports recommended trials of electronic voting.

In 2005, the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) published its final report on *Victorian Electronic Democracy*. SARC observed that electronic voting facilities are used in the ACT and around the world. The Committee indicated that secure electronic voting is possible and desirable in Victoria if the system is designed appropriately.

The report was not in favour of implementing internet-based voting for Parliamentary elections in the near future, although it recommended that the VEC review this decision after each State election (Recommendation 52).

The Committee did recommend (Recommendation 53) that the VEC “in consultation with relevant stakeholder groups, should develop and implement a system of electronic voting machines for local and general elections in Victoria. These machines should:

- permit the casting of a private, unassisted vote for the blind, those Victorians with limited vision, and Victorians with low levels of English literacy;
- provide the same voting instructions as appear on the ballot paper in a range of languages other than English;
- produce a voter verifiable paper trail to be retained by electoral officials;
- allow for the electronic tabulation of votes cast; and
- be restricted to a closed local area network under the complete physical control of electoral officials.”

In July 2006, the *Electoral and Parliamentary Committees Legislation (Amendment) Act 2006* received assent, amending the *Electoral Act 2002*. The Act restricts electronic voting to “electors who because of a visual impairment cannot otherwise vote without assistance” (s.110D). The Act also specifies that the electronic voting solution must meet eight criteria (s.110E, s.110F):

1) Electronic voting must give the same results in the recording of votes as if paper ballots were used.
2) The voter must be able to enter preferences.
3) The voter must be able to correct a mistake before the vote is recorded electronically.
4) The voter must be able to cast an informal vote.
5) The voter must be able to quit the electronic voting process before casting a vote and vote by paper ballot if requested.
6) The electronic voting system must be designed so it can produce a paper trail so the votes can be counted and scrutineered.

7) The electronic voting system must be designed so it is not possible to ascertain the vote of a particular elector.

8) Electronic voting must be secure from interference.

The Act gives the Electoral Commissioner the power to approve that the system meets these criteria.

**Development**

In May 2005, the VEC advertised a tender for interested parties to supply an electronic voting solution. Rather than specifying a particular model for electronic voting, the VEC asked all tenderers to recommend and explain the model that they considered would be most appropriate. Three tenderers were asked to provide a detailed submission explaining the system that they would offer, and two provided proposals. From there, Hewlett-Packard, in partnership with Scytl Secure Electronic Voting, was contracted to develop, implement and support electronic voting.

In coming to this decision, the VEC consulted with representatives of Vision Australia, Scope and the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service. These groups were selected because it was the VEC’s hope to be able to provide electronic voting for electors with vision impairments, motor impairments and poor English language skills. The system selected was the one considered best able to cater for these needs, as well as meet the VEC’s business aims.

Work began on the software development in February 2006. Further consultations regarding the software, hardware and most appropriate venues for the system followed with the VEC’s Electoral Access Advisory Group, Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, Scope and the Western Region Disability Network.

The VEC began user acceptance testing in August, running approximately 2,000 test cases to ensure that the software met the legislative requirements and the VEC’s expectations. After all identified bugs had been resolved, the VEC passed the software and the source code on to an independent, expert software auditor, BMM Test Labs, to certify:

A. The security of the system, with regard to the following requirements:

   a) the Voting Kiosk is protected from intentional manipulation and fraud by electronic means;

   b) the Voting Kiosk is protected from undetected unauthorised change to the following:

      i) defining ballot forms;

      ii) casting and recording of votes;

      iii) alteration of voting system audit logs;

      iv) changing, or preventing the recording of, a vote; and

      v) introducing data for a vote not cast by a registered voter.

   c) the casting of the vote is entirely secret.

B. the Voting Kiosk records votes exactly as cast without any gain or loss;

C. the Voting Kiosk is free from malicious source code; and

D. the VEC’s Electronic Voting Kiosk system will meet the criteria set out in 110E(2) of the Electoral Act 2002.

The auditor found that:

Finding 1: The Auditor is satisfied that the system design includes features that together can provide the level of security required by the VEC.

Finding 2: The Auditor is satisfied that the VEC conducted its testing of the voting kiosk system with due diligence.

Finding 3: The Auditor is satisfied that the VEC voting kiosk system implements audit checks that can verify the integrity of ballots and log files.

Finding 4: The Auditor found no evidence of malicious source code in the voting kiosk system.

Finding 5: There were no errors detected in audit tests of security, accuracy and compliance of the system.

Finding 6: The Auditor is satisfied that risks identified in [its] report have been avoided or minimised to a level that would allow the VEC voting kiosk system to comply with VEC and legislated requirements regarding security, accuracy and voting functionality.
On 23 September 2006, approximately twenty vision-impaired people volunteered their time for a user trial. An area was set up to resemble a voting centre with six voting kiosks, and each vision-impaired person voted, filled out a questionnaire and joined one of three focus groups to discuss their experience and provide feedback. This event was an essential part of the development process and provided a number of key learnings regarding staffing requirements, voting centre procedures and the text, audio and images used on the kiosks.

The feedback received at the user trial enabled the VEC to make several improvements to the software, the hardware and the procedures. For example, several users asserted that they would feel more confident if they could have a practice run prior to casting their vote. This led the VEC to install practice voting kiosks in every E-Centre, an option that received a lot of positive feedback.

The user trial also enabled the VEC to greatly improve the keypad. Following the comments received, the keypad was simplified and made more user-friendly for the vision-impaired: among other things, disabled keys were depressed and more tactile markers were added. A number commented that a custom built keypad would be an advantage but this was beyond the scope of the VEC in 2006.

Three of those who attended were invited back for a more intense workshop focusing specifically on the scripting of the audio for the voting kiosks. This again provided very useful feedback. Some elements of the feedback were impossible to implement in the time-frame, but were noted for the future.

The solution

The final solution implemented was to use non-networked voting kiosks in voting centres. The kiosks were regular, previously un-used PCs with a number of attachments. Instructions and candidate names were displayed on a touch-screen and “read” through headphones playing pre-recorded audio files. Users could choose from two text sizes and have the text either “black on white” or “white on black”. For electors with sufficient vision, options could be selected and voting preferences entered by simply touching the touch-screen.

Elector with severe vision-impairment could use a keypad to move a cursor around the screen, with audio files describing the options and instructions playing as appropriate. Audio feedback was also provided whenever a user selected an option using either the keypad or touch-screen. The volume of the audio could be adjusted or even turned off.
The software was built with the ability to select any of 12 languages (including English) for the instructions. However, as the trial was restricted by legislation to only those voters with a vision-impairment, the menu allowing voters to select a language other than English was disabled for the 2006 State election.

Electors voted by either using the touch-screen or a 19-key keypad. The keypad was a standard numeric keypad with all keys covered with white stickers, and the most important keys marked with Velcro triangles or raised plastic “bumps” so that vision-impaired people could easily identify them. The five non-functional keys were locked down, which also helped electors to identify the functional keys.

It was decided that the best way to support the voting kiosks was to place them within special voting centres, called E-Centres. The E-Centres were open for early voting and election day voting, and were designed to be especially accessible to people with vision-impairments and other disabilities, as well as allowing for electors from anywhere in the State to come to use the specialised facilities. They were to be fully wheelchair accessible according to the VEC’s audit tool, which included considerations such as:

- accessible car parking;
- ready access to public transport;
- a wheelchair-friendly path from the car park to the voting centre;
- wide doorways, without lips or stairs (or with appropriate ramps); and
- sufficient space to allow for the flow of voters in wheelchairs.

It was decided, in consultation with the disability advocacy groups, that it would be best to offer as many ways as practicable to assist people to vote in the E-Centres and not just electronic voting. That way, all people with special needs could be directed towards the E-Centres. The E-Centres therefore also contained:

- closed-circuit television magnifiers;
- hand-held magnifying sheets;
- lamps;
- fat pencils; and
- an enlarged version of the booklet showing the group voting tickets.
The E-Centres were equipped with computers networked to the VEC for the electronic marking of the roll and were able to accept votes for any electorate without the elector having to fill out a declaration envelope.

A range of locations across Victoria was selected for the E-Centres. Four were Vision Australia centres (in Ballarat, Kooyong, Shepparton and Warragul), which were selected because they fitted the criteria and were also familiar venues to people with vision-impairments. The other venues selected were the Melbourne Town Hall and Heidelberg North Leisure Centre. One of the intentions of the trial was to trial a number of different types of venue. Heidelberg was chosen before legislation made electronic voting only available for the vision-impaired – the centre contained a Scope office and ran programmes for mobility-impaired groups. It was also in an area rich in linguistic diversity. Each E-Centre was provided with four voting kiosks and two practice kiosks except for Warragul (which had two voting kiosks and two practice kiosks because of limited space).

**The voting process**

On entering an E-Centre, queue controllers asked electors if they qualified to use electronic voting facilities. If they declared that they did, they were offered the opportunity to have a practice run on one of the two practice kiosks in each E-Centre. The practice kiosks were physically the same as the actual voting kiosks and were running the same software. Instead of voting for their actual electorates, though, voters accessed a dummy electorate with dummy candidates. There was a dedicated staff member standing by the practice kiosks at all times to explain how the equipment worked, guide voters through the process and to answer any questions.

The practice kiosks proved to be very popular, with the majority of voters who cast votes electronically choosing to have a practice beforehand. It was considered extremely valuable to have a person available to answer questions and demonstrate how to use the kiosks while electors were using the dummy candidates, so that a person could be looking over their shoulder and providing advice without the secrecy of the votes being compromised.

After completing a practice vote, or if electors chose not to have a practice vote, electors were directed towards an electronic issuing point. The issuing officers checked the elector’s enrolment and then issued the elector with a smartcard (called an ‘electorate card’), which contained the elector’s district and any accessibility options that the elector had selected (i.e. font size, font colour and volume).

It also contained a status field to indicate whether the elector had completed the voting process, started but not completed it, or was yet to begin. No personal details or any data that could link a vote to a particular elector were on the electorate card. The elector then took the card to one of the voting kiosks. When the card was inserted, the kiosk was activated and the elector was taken through the following screens:

1. an introduction screen explaining what to expect and how to use the kiosk;
2. a screen allowing electors to find out more information or change any of the settings;
3. the Legislative Assembly ballot screen, showing electors the candidates and allowing them to make their selections;
4. a screen asking electors to choose to vote above-the-line or below-the-line;
5. a Legislative Council ballot screen, showing electors either their above-the-line or below-the-line options and allowing them to make their selections;
6. a verification screen reproducing the voters’ Legislative Assembly preferences and providing the opportunity to change those preferences; and
7. a verification screen reproducing the voters’ Legislative Council preferences and providing the opportunity to change those preferences.

Although this was seamless to the elector, the elector’s preferences were passed from one software module to another between steps 5 and 6 above. Therefore the verification stage, in addition to allowing the electors the opportunity to double-check that they were happy with the preferences they entered, also gave electors the opportunity to check that the software was recording their preferences correctly.

If electors entered an informal vote, which they could do through under-voting or not selecting any preferences, the software automatically warned them as soon as they attempted to progress to the next stage and at the verification stage. In both cases, the warning also provided the electors with the ability to change their selections or to continue with an informal vote. It is noteworthy that one of the votes was informal.

After verifying the Legislative Council selections, the electors finally cast their votes by selecting a ‘cast’ option. At any stage before this, electors could quit the process and either start again, or vote using a pencil and paper ballot. The field on the electorate cards enabled election officials to verify whether a person claiming a paper ballot after having started an
electronic vote had actually fully cast an electronic vote or not. That was all that was required of the electors.

The voting preferences were encoded and stored on two media on the voting kiosk (on the hard disk and on a USB key). Voters returned their electorate cards to the election officials, who wiped them and re-encoded them for the next elector.

**Figure 4 Electronic voting process**

After electors cast their votes, the preferences were stored in the voting kiosks in encrypted files. Before any electronic votes were cast, eight members of the VEC at head office were issued with smartcards and each member chose a personal and secret password. The votes could not be decrypted without at least three of those people coming together at the same time and place. This ensured that it was not possible for anybody other than the designated staff to see the votes and that nobody could see the voting preferences before the close of voting.

All votes remained untouched on the kiosks throughout the voting period. After the close of voting, the files were extracted onto CDs and then transported either physically or electronically back to the VEC’s head office. Once there, the files were loaded onto one computer and then decrypted, following three of the eight members coming together and entering their passwords. Ballots were then printed, sorted and distributed to counting centres for inclusion with the other ballots.
Implementation

The voting kiosks at all six E-Centres were able to take votes from 13-25 November 2006 (except Sunday, 17 November). An advertising campaign about the electronic voting and other facilities, targeting vision-impaired electors, was undertaken in October and November. It included the following:

- major advocacy groups Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia published information in their newsletters and on their websites, and encouraged their members to promote the system by word of mouth;
- information was sent out to 7,000 people on Vision Australia’s database in alternative formats: large print, Braille, audio and e-text;
- Radio 3RPH (Radio Print Handicapped) ran advertisements in November, and broadcast a 30 minute interview with Chris Gribbin, the Electronic Voting Project Manager;
- media releases with pre-recorded audio grabs were sent to radio stations near the E-Centres;
- a newsletter was sent to local councils to inform carers of vision-impaired people;
- detailed information on electronic voting was published on the VEC’s website from early October, including in audio and large print formats;
- the project was covered on Channel 9 and on local television networks (WIN TV Ballarat, Gippsland and Shepparton);
- Vision Australia took out advertisements about electronic voting in a number of local papers; and
- articles were published in The Age, the Australian Financial Review and the Melbourne Times, as well as in over fifteen local newspapers.

Over the course of the voting period, 199 electors cast electronic votes. They were distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-Centre:</th>
<th>Number of electronic voters:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat Vision Australia Centre</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg Leisure Centre</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kooyong Vision Australia Centre</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne Town Hall</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepparton Vision Australia Centre</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warragul Vision Australia Centre</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those votes, 12% were cast on election day and 88% before that. There were also in excess of 24,000 non-electronic voters at the E-Centres (although 49.8% of those non-electronic votes were cast at Melbourne Town Hall).

With respect to the accessibility features, voters made use of the options as follows:

Table 16 Options used at E-Centres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature:</th>
<th>Option:</th>
<th>Percentage of users:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text colour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black on white</td>
<td>90.95%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White on black</td>
<td>9.05%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Default size</td>
<td>77.89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large print</td>
<td>22.11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (silent)</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.02%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 (default)</td>
<td>44.22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>1.51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This clearly shows the importance of including all of these options. It is also noteworthy that 12% of the voters chose to vote below-the-line for the Legislative Council, a significantly higher proportion than amongst the voters as a whole (approximately 5%). Vision-impaired electors in focus groups indicated that this was because they had not had a chance to vote below-the-line in Senate elections previously, as they had always had to rely on another person to fill out the ballot paper for them, and had felt awkward asking someone else to spend so long helping them to vote. This was, for many, the first opportunity to vote below-the-line, and they were eager to take it. One user explained, “For the Senate in the Federal Parliament for instance, I have always opted for the easy approach and voted above the line. Most people do this by choice; in reality we’ve had no alternative.”
The software allowed people to cast informal votes through either under-voting or not giving any preferences, and one (0.5%) of the votes was informal for the Legislative Assembly and none for the Legislative Council. This is significantly less than amongst the voting population as a whole, as one would expect given the effort required to vote electronically (making deliberate informality less likely) and the fact that the software warned voters that their vote would be informal and gave them the opportunity to change it before they cast it.

It is noteworthy, though, that nine Legislative Assembly votes (4.5%) were formal but did not have the last preference filled in. As this is a significantly higher proportion than amongst the voting population as a whole, this suggests that the warning message was used a number of times by voters to determine whether or not they had finished their vote and that they proceeded to the next step as soon as they failed to get that message. Clearly, this is an essential and helpful feature for an electronic voting solution for the vision-impaired.

The other noteworthy fact about the electronic votes is the length of time taken to cast one. The average length of time to cast an electronic vote was just under six minutes. The VEC was aware that the process would necessarily take significantly longer for an elector relying on audio instructions and feedback. Vision-impaired people in the focus groups commented that many things take longer for them and that this would not be an issue. Indeed, the process of voting on a paper ballot with assistance takes significantly longer than it takes a person not requiring assistance. Few electronic voters raised time concerns as a problem in feedback after the election.

In the implementation phase, there were no significant bugs or anomalies detected in the system. Some of the monitors were faulty, and had to be replaced, but this was done very rapidly and did not prevent anyone from voting. The central processing unit of each computer was encased in a Perspex case with numbered seals, which were checked at the start and end of each day and there were no unaccounted-for changes to the seals. The software kept log files, which recorded events that took place on each kiosk, and would detect any tampering. These files were examined after the close of voting and no suspicious activity was recorded in these files. Daily reconciliations between the number of electronic votes issued and the number of votes recorded on the kiosks showed no anomalies. Given these factors, the VEC has no reason to doubt the integrity, accuracy and authenticity of the electronic votes.

### Feedback

The VEC gathered feedback about the electronic voting trial from a number of sources:

- a number of site visits throughout the election;
- a debriefing session with the VEC staff who managed the E-Centres;
- a feedback session with representatives of Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia; and
- face-to-face interviews with eleven randomly-selected vision-impaired voters conducted by Colmar Brunton.

A number of voters also sent personal correspondence to the VEC about their experiences.

Overall, the feedback to the VEC from all sources was very positive. A high proportion of users considered having a secret vote and being able to enter their preferences themselves to be important and key reasons for choosing to vote secretly. This was borne out in some of the correspondence received by the VEC:

- “It was wonderful to be able to do your own voting and not have to rely on someone filling in the ballot paper for you, hoping they do it the way you want.”
- “Yesterday was a milestone in my life because for the first time I was able to vote independently.”
- “Until now, I have just assumed that filling out the ballot paper was not for me and that it would always be done by a trusted friend under my instruction…. Electronic voting has the potential to transform voting into a satisfying and relaxed experience.”
- “I never had an interest in politics before, but now I can vote on my own I have a reason to.”

Some of the factors that were particularly valued by users included:

- staff trained in working with people with a vision-impairment;
- the option to have a practice vote before actually voting – one voter explained, “the whole thing became clear after the first run-through, so that when it came to filling in the proper ballot papers, I was very confident”;
- those who could read Braille found the Braille instructions next to each kiosk helpful; and
- the additional equipment such as closed circuit televisions, magnifiers and large pencils also proved very popular.
In practice, there were two quite different ways of using the electronic voting kiosks – either by using the touch screen and reading the text or by using the keypad and hearing the options through the headphones. Both types of users were questioned, and both methods were well received. Importantly, people who used the system overwhelmingly said that they would vote electronically again in the future.

A number of minor changes to the software and hardware were recommended by voters to improve usability (for example, the ability to change the speed or pause the audio instructions, longer cables for the headphones, layout of the kiosks). A number of users indicated that a custom-built keypad would improve usability. The VEC will assess the feasibility of implementing these changes prior to the next use of electronic voting.

**Analysis of the trial**

The VEC considers that the trial of electronic voting at the 2006 State election was a success. The technology has been proven to work and be appropriate in a real election environment.

As mentioned, there was no reason to doubt the integrity, accuracy or authenticity of any of the votes. In feedback, voters reported high levels of satisfaction with the software. A small number of voters started on the practice kiosk, but decided that it was too hard and opted for a paper vote instead. A few people started voting electronically, but abandoned their votes. Given the complexity of the voting system in Victoria (with two different types of ballot paper with different formality rules and above-the-line and below-the-line voting for the Legislative Council) and the difficulties inherent in voting for the vision-impaired using any electronic system, the VEC considers that the software trialled at the 2006 State election is acceptable and appropriate to Victoria’s needs.

There are a small number of minor changes to the software that were recommended by voters to improve usability (for example, the ability to change the speed or pause the audio instructions). The VEC will assess the feasibility of implementing these changes prior to the next use of electronic voting.
A major issue regarding the feasibility of future potential uses of the software is cost. Substantial costs were incurred in resourcing the E-Centres, compared to other voting centres, which limit the practicality of having more E-Centres under the present legislative provisions. Extending the franchise of users for electronic voting could substantially reduce the cost per vote and maximise the return on the investment.

Regarding venues, the VEC believes that placing the electronic voting kiosks within the E-Centres which catered for various disabilities worked well. The VEC notes the particularly low electronic vote turn-out at the Heidelberg E-Centre. The VEC considers that this shows the importance of choosing venues that are familiar to vision-impaired voters if the use of electronic voting is restricted to these electors.

A significant issue is that the participation rate for electronic voting was significantly less than had been hoped for, and well below the capacity of the infrastructure put in place. Although the VEC considers that it achieved a good spread of publicity, anecdotally it was suggested that there was a low rate of awareness of the trial amongst the vision-impaired community. A number of people who did vote at Vision Australia centres had not come there specifically to vote, but had come for other reasons and only voted electronically due to ‘spruiking’ by VEC staff. The two Vision Australia centres that took the most electronic votes (Kooyong and Ballarat) were the larger ones where regular programmes continued through the voting period. Other reasons suggested as to why people were hesitant included:

- concern that by declaring themselves to be vision-impaired, electors may then be labelled disabled by other government departments;
- vision-impairment is quite often related to ageing and older people tend to be less comfortable with computers;
- there were concerns about the security of the system, based on issues encountered overseas with electronic voting and some misunderstandings about how the system worked (one person reported that the name ‘E-Centre’ had caused some confusion because it suggested that the votes were emailed); and
- many vision-impaired voters are registered as general postal voters and so are automatically sent their ballot papers – many may have found it easier to simply fill in those papers rather than come to a voting centre, or may have filled them out before learning about the electronic voting option.

Feedback suggested that now that the system has been successfully trialled, and as word of mouth spreads, a larger number of people will be more likely to use the system at future elections. It was also suggested that an improved participation rate could come from advertising the system in mainstream radio and television and approaching carers’ associations, retirement villages etc. Feedback indicated that it is important to use venues that large numbers of vision-impaired people are visiting for other purposes during the election period.

One thing noted by the VEC in the development of the electronic voting system is that it would be of advantage to all of the electoral commissions of Australia to have a set of standards that an electronic voting solution should meet. This would make the process of tendering for electronic voting in the future easier for both electoral commissions and suppliers, and would help to ensure some consistency across Australia. A number of vision-impaired people have commented that it would be confusing for voters to have to use systems that are operated differently at the State level compared to the Federal level. As a result, the VEC will work with interstate and Commonwealth colleagues in order to meet this objective.

The VEC has also identified some legislative changes in Section 10, for consideration in light of the trial.