Section 3
Voting
Voting

Voter turnout and informal voting rates are useful indicators of the health of an electoral system. These indicators may be affected by factors other than the services provided by an electoral authority, including interest in the election, election issues, the geography and demographic composition of the electorate, and even the weather on Election Day.

By providing Victorians with the voting services and information they needed to participate fully and appropriately in the election, the VEC sought to maximise voter participation and reduce informal voting.

**Voter turnout**

Voter turnout at the 2010 State election for the Lower House was 92.96% of the total electors enrolled, slightly higher than the 92.73% at the 2006 State election, but lower than the 93.15% recorded at the 2002 State election. A table showing voter turnout and informality rates for Australian parliamentary elections is included as Appendix 7.

**Informal voting**

The proportion of informal votes for the Legislative Assembly (Lower House) at the 2010 election was 4.96%, slightly higher than previous informality rates of 4.56% in 2006 and 3.42% in 2002.

The rate of informal votes for the Legislative Council (Upper House) was 3.38%, which was almost one percentage point lower than for the 2006 State election. The decrease may be due to growing familiarity with the voting system. An analysis of informal ballot papers can be found in the overview of statistics section of this report.

**Voting services**

*Arrangements for voting before Election Day*

The VEC made a variety of arrangements for electors who were unable to attend a voting centre on Election Day. A total of 817,263 Victorians voted before Election Day, representing 24.54% of all votes cast (22.82% of electors on the roll). There is a significant and notable increase in the number of votes being cast before Election Day at Victorian State elections. The total number of votes that were cast before Election Day and counted was a 69% increase on the number at 2006 State election (468,567 or 15.07% of all votes cast) and a 156% increase on that of 2002 (10.29% of all votes).

*Early voting in person*

Voting in person was available at 101 early voting centres throughout the State prior to Election Day. Early voting centres were open for two weeks, from Friday, 12 November, to Friday, 26 November. In addition to business hours, these centres were open until 8:00pm on Thursday, 25 November, and from 8.00am to 2.00pm on Saturday, 20 November, to meet the needs of those members of the community who could not vote on Election Day or during business hours.

There were 559,857 votes cast at early voting centres prior to Election Day, more than twice the number of votes cast at early voting centres in 2006. In most cases, the election office was considered to be appropriately located for the purpose of voting prior to Election Day. However, an additional 45 early voting centres were established to supplement election offices, including one each at Melbourne and Avalon airports. The VEC received a small number of complaints relating to the location of, or difficulty finding early voting centres, and will consider all comments for future elections.

Operating hours at early voting centres at both airports were extended to ensure that electors leaving Victoria on all major flights could vote. At Melbourne Airport, operating hours were 5.00am to 10.00pm from Monday 15 to Thursday, 25 November and until 6.00pm on Friday, 26 November. Avalon Airport operating hours were 5.00am to 7.30pm from Monday, 15 November to Thursday, 25 November and until 6.00pm on Friday, 26 November. Operating hours also included the weekend of 20 and 21 November at both airports.

Elector with special circumstances were able to vote from 4.00pm on Friday, 12 November, four hours after the close of nominations. However, they were only able to vote on ballot papers with below-the-line voting options, as group voting tickets were not finalised until the Sunday after the commencement of early voting. The very short period between the close of nominations and commencement of early voting does not allow enough time for the production and distribution of ballot papers, so ballot papers were printed on-site at election offices.

The use of Netbooks at all early voting centres enabled staff to identify an elector’s correct enrolled address and district, so that the elector could cast a ballot without having to complete a declaration envelope, making voting much quicker. Electors were marked directly on the VEC’s central database as having voted. A list of early voting centres is included as Appendix 11.

*Office network*

For the 2010 State election the VEC’s infrastructure was expanded to cater for network links from 64 election offices, 45 early voting centres, the Telephone Enquiry Service, WebCentral (which hosted the VEC’s virtual tallies room and other critical websites), a microwave radio link to the VEC’s tally room at Etihad Stadium as well as 750 NextG connections and two connections from the United Kingdom. In addition, the VEC provided remote access to the roll for interstate and overseas voting centres and acted as the back site for the VEC’s electronically assisted voting solution.
Interstate and overseas locations

Early voting was possible at 11 interstate and 34 overseas locations. A total of 10,758 votes were returned from outside Victoria during the 2010 State election. This is slightly fewer than in 2006 (10,805) but more than 8,205 votes cast outside Victoria at the 2002 State election. Lists of early voting centres are included as Appendices 12 and 13.

Homelessness agencies

A mobile early voting team visited 11 homelessness agency locations between 16 and 26 November. Spending between two to three hours at each location, staff offered voting services including, and in accordance with new legislation, the opportunity to enrol and vote provisionally on the spot. Cardboard voting screens were setup, and staff used an electronic roll to mark electors as having voted. In addition to the 355 votes cast in 2010, 44 provisional votes were cast by people experiencing homelessness who, under new legislation, were able to enrol and vote on the spot if certain criteria were satisfied.

Prisons and correctional facilities

Mobile early voting facilities were established six correctional centres for the 2010 State election; the Melbourne Assessment Centre, Melbourne Remand Centre, Barwon Prison, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, Marrongeet Correctional Centre and Port Phillip Prison.

Mobile early voting

The Electoral Commissioner has the authority to appoint certain institutions as mobile early voting centres, to enable electors in those institutions to vote on the spot when a mobile voting team visits in the lead-up to a State election. Mobile early voting teams may visit establishments such as nursing homes, hostels and hospitals.

There were 986 mobile early voting centres appointed for the 2010 State election, compared with 892 locations in 2006. Some venues requested postal voting services only and 833 requested a mobile voting team to visit.

For the first time, Netbooks were used at voting centres where a mobile service was provided. The Netbooks provided access to the State election roll to assist election officials to identify each elector’s correct enrolment details and to mark them directly on the VEC’s central database as having voted. A total of 39,468 votes were issued to electors at mobile early voting centres.

Figure 5: Votes cast at interstate and overseas locations at Victorian State elections, 2002–2010

Figure 6: Votes cast at targeted mobile early voting sessions, Victorian State elections, 2006–2010

Homelessness agencies

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Cardboard voting screens were setup, and staff used an electronic roll to mark electors as having voted. In addition to the 355 votes cast in 2010, 44 provisional votes were cast by people experiencing homelessness who, under new legislation, were able to enrol and vote on the spot if certain criteria were satisfied.

Prisons and correctional facilities

Mobile early voting facilities were established six correctional centres for the 2010 State election; the Melbourne Assessment Centre, Melbourne Remand Centre, Barwon Prison, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, Marrongeet Correctional Centre and Port Phillip Prison.
Blind and low vision service agencies

The VEC provided mobile voting facilities at a number of agencies that provide support services for electors who are blind or have low vision. This included Vision Australia Centres at Geelong, Kensington, Bendigo, Dandenong, Warrnambool and Mildura and at Blind Citizens Australia Melbourne and Guide Dogs Australia in East Melbourne.

Aboriginal communities

For the 2010 State election, the VEC provided a mobile early voting service at Lake Tyers, an Aboriginal community with approximately 150 residents and 30 staff members.

Mobile early voting services at disability service agencies

Mobile early voting was offered as a pilot specialist service to Scope day centres. This offer was declined as Scope advised that, in line with its inclusion-based approach, it preferred to encourage clients to use a voting centre.

Early voting by post

Electors unable to attend a voting centre on Election Day could access a postal vote in the following ways:

- Collecting an application form for a postal vote from any post office in Victoria
- Collecting an application form from any election office or interstate or overseas voting location
- Downloading a postal vote application from the VEC’s website
- Telephoning the VEC’s telephone enquiry service to request an application form be posted to them
- Using an application form provided by a political party

Postal vote applications were scanned and processed electronically, centrally by the VEC, eliminating labour-intensive handling of paper applications and helped to ensure the efficient delivery of ballot packs. The VEC’s Election Management System enabled election officials to track all applications and inform electors of the status of their application at any time.

As an initiative, the VEC introduced emailed ballot material for the 2010 State election. This facility was only available to electors in remote areas or overseas who would experience difficulty in accessing postal facilities. Electors could submit a postal vote application by email, providing an email address for receipt of ballot material. The VEC processed each application and then sent two emails to each elector who requested the email ballot material service, the first containing a secure file with all ballot material required to vote, and the second containing a password for the elector to access the ballot material file. A total of 1,212 emailed ballot packs were despatched during the election.

Once the initial backlog of postal vote applications was cleared (two working days after the close of nominations), all further postal vote applications were processed on the day they were received by the VEC.

As occurred at the 2006 State election, a number of electors had difficulty with the witness provisions on the application form. The application form requires a ‘Title or capacity as witness’ to be completed by the witness, with an accompanying list of categories of capacity. The VEC modified the application to clarify these requirements. However, many electors presumed this section required either ‘Mr’, ‘Mrs’ etc, or a description of the relationship i.e. hairdresser, neighbour. Political parties and candidates were advised of the Electoral Commissioner’s intention to authorise the issue of ballot materials where the elector had signed the application in the presence of a witness, and the witness’ address and signature were present on the application. While the VEC took action to provide additional information alerting witnesses of the need to write ‘elector’, it remained an issue when processing applications.

As occurred at the 2006 State election, some electors who applied for a postal vote also voted at an early voting centre prior to receiving their ballot packs. The introduction of Netbooks at all early voting centres allowed the VEC to identify any elector who had been issued with, but had not returned a postal vote. The computerised system used to mark electors off the roll prior to issuing a vote cancelled the postal vote issued to any elector who wished to cast an early vote instead. If the postal vote was inadvertently returned, it was rejected by the system and not counted.

Australia Post is an important partner in the postal voting system, and the VEC used ‘Express Post’ for delivery of election material in the week prior to Election Day. This was to ensure that ballot material was delivered by the fastest mail option possible. On Election Day, returned declarations could be quickly checked against the elector’s signature on the scanned image of the postal vote application. As a result, most postal votes were included in the count on election night.
Provisional voting

Under new legislation introduced in 2010, section 108 of the Electoral Act 2002 was updated to replace unenrolled voting with provisional voting. People who were found not to be enrolled when they attended to vote at this election were able to enrol and cast a provisional vote at a voting centre. They were required to show a proof of identification such as a driver licence or learner permit, or to nominate a service provider to be contacted to verify identity. After Election Day, the VEC checked the enrolment applications and verified identities and addresses with service providers, and, if everything was satisfactory, enrolled the applicants and admitted their votes to scrutiny at the election. An analysis of the enrolment history for electors who enrolled on the day is shown in Figure 8.

Registered General Postal Voters

Electors who satisfy certain statutory requirements regarding their inability 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 and local government attendance elections.

There were 51,713 registered General Postal Voters at the 2010 State election. This figure demonstrates an increasing trend of voters in this category (31,243 in 2002 and 41,722 in 2006).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>110</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
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<td>19.5%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>69.6%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>106</td>
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<td>513</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
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<td>401</td>
<td>94</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferntree Gully</td>
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<td>489</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>744</td>
<td>731</td>
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<td>-1.3%</td>
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<td>38.7%</td>
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<td>433</td>
<td>123</td>
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<td>520</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gippsland South</td>
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<td>330</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hastings</td>
<td>628</td>
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<td>Hawthorn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ivanhoe</td>
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<td>Keilor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kororit</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Macedon</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Malvern          | 426  | 698  | 275      | 65.0% |
Melbourne        | 349  | 497  | 151      | 43.6% |
Melton           | 313  | 476  | 163      | 52.1% |
Mildura          | 441  | 663  | 222      | 50.3% |
Mill Park         | 222  | 410  | 189      | 85.5% |
Mitcham          | 394  | 487  | 96       | 24.6% |
Monbulk          | 316  | 410  | 94       | 29.7% |
Mordialloc       | 437  | 503  | 67       | 15.4% |
Mornington       | 570  | 753  | 183      | 32.1% |
Morwell          | 256  | 379  | 123      | 48.0% |
Mount Waverley   | 379  | 421  | 42       | 11.4% |
Mulgave          | 263  | 396  | 133      | 50.6% |
Murray Valley    | 277  | 342  | 65       | 23.5% |
Narracon         | 343  | 411  | 69       | 20.2% |
Narre Warren North | 256  | 369  | 115      | 45.3% |
Narre Warren South | 382  | 525  | 143      | 37.4% |
Nepean           | 1,181| 930  | -249     | -21.1%|
Niddrie          | 646  | 825  | 180      | 27.9% |
Northcote        | 1,415| 1,169| -243     | -17.2%|
Oakleigh         | 432  | 510  | 80       | 18.6% |
Pascoe Vale      | 799  | 1,001| 204      | 25.6% |
Polwarth         | 855  | 798  | -54      | -6.3% |
Prahran          | 495  | 693  | 202      | 41.1% |
Preston           | 588  | 586  | -1       | -0.2% |
Richmond         | 285  | 411  | 127      | 44.7% |
Ripon            | 357  | 384  | 28       | 7.9%  |
Rodney           | 164  | 234  | 70       | 42.7% |
Sandringham      | 404  | 537  | 135      | 33.6% |
Scoresby         | 411  | 525  | 114      | 27.7% |
Seymour          | 260  | 353  | 113      | 47.1% |
Shepparton       | 197  | 286  | 89       | 45.2% |
South Barwon     | 947  | 1,106| 163      | 17.3% |
South-West Coast | 680  | 522  | -156     | -23.0%|
Swan Hill        | 448  | 480  | 32       | 7.1%  |
Tarneit          | 460  | 661  | 204      | 44.6% |
Thomastown       | 320  | 421  | 101      | 31.6% |
Warrandyte       | 474  | 549  | 76       | 16.1% |
Williamstown     | 395  | 578  | 183      | 46.3% |
Yan Yean         | 288  | 624  | 337      | 117.4%|
Yuroke           | 188  | 348  | 160      | 85.1% |
Total            | 41,722| 51,713| 10,091   | 24.2% |

Figure 10: Registered General Postal voters by district, Victorian State elections, 2006-10
Antarctic electors

An ‘Antarctic elector’ is an elector who has made a request under the Electoral Act 2002 to be treated as such while employed in Antarctica. Antarctic electors were provided with specially designed, secure electronic ballot papers. On completion, the ballot papers were automatically sent to a secure mailbox at the VEC. Twenty-one votes were returned by Antarctic electors of which fifteen were able to be included in the count.

Arrangements for voting on Election Day

Voting took place between 8.00am and 6.00pm at 1,839 voting centres throughout Victoria on Election Day, Saturday, 27 November 2010.

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

Of the total votes counted for the election, 2,538,460 were issued on Election Day. This compares with 2,641,340 in 2006 and 2,698,026 in 2002.

A total of 158 joint voting centres were established for this election, compared with 147 in 2006 and 23 in 2002. The aim of establishing a joint voting centre is to reduce the number of absent votes issued at voting centres located close to electorate boundaries, thereby speeding up the voting process for affected electors.

Voting centres were established primarily in schools and community halls selected by Election Managers during preparation for the election, with a preference for those that were wheelchair accessible. Disability and community groups were invited to suggest suitable voting centres that the VEC had not already identified.

An accessibility audit of all selected venues was conducted and they were subsequently classified according to recognised national accessibility standards. Despite its best efforts, the VEC continues to be disappointed with the lack of wheelchair accessible venues available for use as voting centres – particularly given that most of the venues are State Government-owned.

Voting centre locations were promoted through the VEC’s telephone enquiry service, online through the voting centre look up and via an iPhone app. In addition, all voting centres were listed in major daily and Regional newspapers. The accessibility rating of all centres was included and those venues rated as ‘assisted access’ included a brief description of their accessibility limitations.

The Victorian Electoral Commission reviewed its election workforce planning, and incorporated feedback and observations from the 2006 State election, along with consideration of the EMC recommendations, when developing the plan for the 2010 State election. Targets were set for completion of tasks in each voting centre no later than 10.00pm. To reduce queue length and voter waiting time, ordinary issuing point loadings were decreased from 600 to 550 votes issued on Election Day per ordinary issuing point. Total voting centre staffing increased from 14,811 to 16,993.

The VEC introduced two new part-day employment positions designed to supplement voting centre staffing during the morning when voter numbers are generally higher, and to assist with counting after 6pm, reducing expected count completion times. A total of 563 part-day voting centre support officers, and 1,187 part-day count support officers were appointed.

The VEC exceeded its 2010 target that voter estimates would be within 550 ordinary votes (i.e. one issuing table) for 99% of appointed voting centres, achieving 99.02%, compared with 97.68% in 2006. Despite a high correlation between expected and actual voter numbers at each voting centre, it was observed that higher than usual numbers of electors attended to vote early in the day. This may have been due to the forecast of extreme weather conditions later in the day.

By 10.00pm on election night, 98.9% of primary district results were entered, compared with 96.4% at the same time in 2006.

Figure 11: Voting centres, Victorian State elections, 2006-2010
Electoral information in 22 languages and English was available on the VEC’s website, and a telephone interpreter service was advertised. The telephone service provided pre-recorded information specific to each phase of the election and an option for the caller to request the services of an interpreter.

Translated audio files were also available via the VEC’s website for those non-English speaking electors who were not literate in their own language.

Translated instructions for the use of touchscreens and telephones for electronically assisted voting (EAV) were also available in the 12 languages offered on the EAV system.

The VEC website conforms to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 conventions for accessibility. A link to BrowseAloud, a downloadable application that reads the text on a website, is provided on the VEC website.

**Additional voting services**

The VEC is committed to ensuring maximum accessibility to voting. As such, an analysis was conducted to identify any key events that were occurring on Saturday, 27 November, so that suitable services could be provided for electors attending these events. The VEC contacted organisers of these events to coordinate information for participants, examine opportunities to advertise in relevant publications, or in some instances to provide advice on voting centres close to the events. Major events catered for included the Corporate Games, Great Victorian Bike Ride, Queenscliff Music Festival, La Dolce Vita Wangaratta, Eltham Amateur Wine Show and Mt Eliza Yoga Retreat.

The VEC also provided a specialised postal voting service for passengers travelling on the Dawn Princess cruise ship, which departed from Melbourne on 10 November, stopping at various ports around Australia and returning to Melbourne on 8 December.

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**Assistance for electors from non-English speaking backgrounds**

At the 2010 State election, voting instructions in a range of languages were printed on the voter-facing side of every voting screen. The VEC developed an online registration facility that included questions about foreign language fluency, for people seeking election work. This resulted in the number of staff identifying as having skills in other languages as well as English, increasing from 1,669 in 2006 to 2,931 in 2010. Data from the 2006 census and Department of Immigration settlement statistics were analysed to assess the main languages spoken in each district. This analysis was provided to Election Managers and Voting Centre Managers to assist with strategic recruitment and placement of election staff in relation to the languages spoken in each area.

The Electoral Amendment (Electoral Participation) Act 2010, passed in August 2010, amended the Electoral Act 2002 to enable electronically assisted voting (EAV) to be offered at the 2010 State election to electors whose first language is not English, electors with low literacy and electors with a motor skill impairment as well as electors who are blind or have low vision. The EAV piloted at the 2006 election was further developed, and made available at all early voting venues at the 2010 State election. Almost 1000 votes were received electronically.

Publishing key election information in accessible formats including Easy English is a major commitment outlined in the VEC’s Disability Action Plan. The VEC developed an Easy English Guide to the 2010 State election, which was extremely popular.