Section 4
Electronically Assisted Voting
In July 2006, the Electoral and Parliamentary Committees Legislation (Amendment) Act 2006 was passed by the Parliament. This allowed for the introduction of Electronically Assisted Voting (EAV) at the 2006 State election, and the VEC conducted a limited pilot of Electronically Assisted Voting (EAV) for electors who are blind or who have low vision. The VEC established six ‘E-Centres’ (five in metropolitan areas and one in Geelong) enabling electors to vote using whichever combination of touchscreen kiosk, headphones and keypad that best suited their needs.

The technology proved successful with no security issues and very encouraging user feedback. In its report on the 2006 State election, the VEC recommended that the group of electors eligible to use the service be expanded to include electors with a motor skill impairment, electors whose first language is not English, and those with low or no English literacy. The Electoral Amendment (Electoral Participation) Act 2010 (EA Act) amended the Electoral Act 2002 (the Act) to include these groups within the EAV franchise.

Elections located outside Victoria had been included in the EAV franchise in the legislation passed prior to the 2006 State election, but regulatory amendments (ultimately made in 2010) were required to enable the provision of EAV to this group.

Enhancements to the EAV system were developed in response to findings from both the 2006 Victorian State election, and the 2007 Australian Federal election, where a kiosk-type electronic solution was also used. The enhancements also took into account the recommendations and suggestions in the Electoral Matters Committee’s 2008 report.

EAV was successfully rolled out to each of the 101 early voting centres located across Victoria for the 2010 State election. In addition, the VEC provided EAV facilities for electors at eight interstate voting centres and at two centres in the United Kingdom. This increased the number of votes fivefold, empowering many voters to cast their vote in secret at a State election for the first time. A major change at this election was the introduction of a telephone for electors who are blind or who have low vision. The touchscreen with headphones was used only by electors with some vision.

A total of 160 election officials were trained to set up, test and support the deployment of the touchscreens and phones around Victoria, interstate and in the United Kingdom. This training was reinforced in the weeks before the election in a simulation exercise that included high volumes of electors. This was invaluable for the VEC to identify and address potential problems prior to the start of the early voting period.

The VEC provided 208 telephones with recorded instructions to guide the elector through the voting process. Audio prompts were supplied in 12 languages selected after demographic research, ballot paper analysis and consultation. The available languages were Arabic, Cantonese, Croatian, English, Greek, Italian, Khmer, Macedonian, Mandarin, Serbian, Turkish and Vietnamese.

Every early voting centre had at least two telephones and nearly half the centres also had the option of an EAV touchscreen system. Electors could listen to audio cues via a headset and follow the instructions on the touchscreen provided to cast their vote. These instructions were provided in the selected 12 languages.

All votes were cast in secret and moved through three phases – vote, verify and submit. Upon completion of each virtual ballot paper, the elector was able to review and verify their vote and revise them if they wished. The system advised them if they were about to make an informal vote and would accept the vote as informal if that was the intention. Once the vote was cast it was encrypted and sent to the VEC to be printed out on election night.

The elector was also offered the option of a printed receipt with a transaction number that could be entered on the VEC’s website after the election and verified that the electronic vote had been received. Neither the receipt nor the website disclosed the vote itself, rather just the fact that the vote had been received and counted.

The voting totals from all locations including practice votes, and the final numbers for binding votes are detailed in Figure 13. See Appendix 8 for maps showing the distribution of electronically assisted voting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice kiosk votes</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice telephone votes</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binding kiosk votes</td>
<td>841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binding telephone votes</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of votes</td>
<td>1116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of binding</td>
<td>961</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Electronically assisted votes, 2010 Victorian State election
An informality rate of 1% was recorded in relation to votes taken via EAV compared with an average informality rate of 4.96% for non-EAV users. Nearly 10% of EAV users voted below-the-line for the Upper House in comparison to an average of 4% of non-EAV users voting below-the-line.

Overarching considerations of the EAV project were protecting the integrity of the secret ballot and ensuring the security of the system. The VEC appointed a Technical Officer to audit the integrity of the system. The Technical Officer was satisfied by the VEC’s implementation of EAV, making recommendations for the VEC to consider. These will be discussed in the VEC’s formal report on the EAV project.

EAV was considered by the users to be an overwhelming success. In an independent survey conducted by Colmar-Brunton Social Research, 100% of blind and low vision voters sampled stated they were ‘highly satisfied’ with the service and would use it again. There was also a high level of confidence in the system with 100% of these users believing their votes were recorded accurately. Voters also commended the system as easy to use, private and convenient.

A full report of the electronically assisted voting project will be published during 2011.

With the introduction of electronically assisted voting in the United Kingdom, the VEC appointed a staff member (or VEC representative) specifically to oversee this project, who was based in London during the voting period. The VEC representative was responsible for all aspects of electronically assisted voting in Manchester and London, including the set-up and removal of equipment at each venue, and the training and support of staff appointed as early voting officials.

In order to establish an early voting centre at Victoria House, London, the VEC commenced negotiation with the Agent General, Sally Capp in May 2010. It was important that the relationship between the VEC representative in London and the staff provided by the Agent General’s office be cohesive. Effective planning and early consultation resulted in a very successful project, with over 700 electronically assisted votes taken in London. The VEC appreciates the assistance provided by the Agent General.