Voting Centre
8. Voting

Along with enrolment, voter turnout and formal voting rates are useful indicators of the health of an electoral system. These participation 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 2014 State election for the Lower House was 93.02% of total electors enrolled, slightly higher than the 92.96% at the 2010 State election and the 92.73% at the 2006 State election. Figure 11 shows the proportion of votes by vote type for the 2006-2014 State elections.

Formal Voting

The VEC presents a variety of programs and activities on an ongoing basis to help ensure that voters know how to vote correctly so that their vote counts (see Community Education and Engagement section). Election-specific campaigns also focus on how to vote correctly. The proportion of voters who voted formally at the 2014 state election was 94.78%. The 5.22% of voters who voted informally appear to have done so for a range of reasons including numbering errors, apparently deliberate intention and misunderstanding of how to cast a formal vote (use of crosses and ticks). An analysis of informal votes conducted after the 2014 state election is included in this document.

Of the total votes counted for the election, 2,333,007 (65.89%) were issued on Election Day. This compares with 2,538,460 (76.23%) in 2010 and 2,641,340 (84.93%) in 2006, and reflects the increasing trend towards early voting.

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![Figure 10: Participation: Enrolment, turnout and formality rates, Victorian State election 2014](image1)

![Figure 11: Votes by vote type, Victorian State elections, 2006-2014](image2)
Arrangements for Voting on Election Day

Voting took place between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm at 1,786 voting centres throughout Victoria on Election Day, Saturday 29 November 2014. 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’.

The VEC establishes a number of joint voting centres with the aim of reducing the number of absent votes issued at voting centres located close to electorate boundaries, thereby speeding up the voting process for affected electors. A total of 97 joint voting centres were established for this election, compared with 158 in 2010 and 147 in 2006. See Figure 12 for voting centres by type.

Voting centres were established primarily in schools and community halls selected by VEC Election Services staff 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 by Election Managers and venues 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. See Figure 13 for accessibility rating of Election day voting centres.

Voting centre locations were promoted through the VEC’s telephone enquiry service and online through the voting centre look up and mobile app. In addition, all voting centres were listed in major daily and regional newspapers. The accessibility rating of all centres was included, and a brief description of accessibility limitations was included for venues rated as ‘Assisted Wheelchair Access’.

Estimates for the number of voters anticipated to attend each Election Day voting centre were based on statistics from the 2010 State election, the 2013 Federal election, and consideration of the impact of the 2012-13 State redivision. An analysis of ordinary votes taken at each venue against the estimates showed that estimates accuracy has increased, with 99.83% of estimates within 550 voters (one issuing table) of the actual figures. This is an increase on the 99.02% achieved in 2010 and 97.68% in 2006.

The Victorian Electoral Commission reviewed its election workforce planning, and incorporated feedback and observations from the 2010 State election, along with consideration of the EMC recommendations, when developing the plan for the 2014 State election. Targets were set for completion of tasks in each voting centre no later than 10.00 pm.
Arrangements for Voting Before Election Day

There has been a significant and notable increase in the number of votes being cast before Election Day at Victorian State elections. In planning for the 2014 State election, the VEC made a variety of arrangements for electors who were unable to attend a voting centre on Election Day.

A total of 1,207,538 Victorians voted before Election Day, representing 34.11% of all votes cast. This was a 52.58% increase on the number of votes cast before Election Day at the 2010 State election (791,405 votes) and a 157.71% increase on that of 2006 (488,567 votes), see Figure 14 for details of votes cast before Election Day.

Early Voting in Person

Early voting in person was available prior to Election Day at 100 early voting centres throughout the State. These early voting centres were open for two weeks, from Monday 17 November to Friday 28 November. In addition to business hours, these centres were open until 8:00 pm on Thursday 27 November, and from 8.00 am to 2.00 pm on Saturday 22 November, to meet the needs of those members of the community who could not attend a voting centre on Election Day or during business hours.

Electors with special circumstances were able to vote from 4.00 pm on Friday 14 November, four hours after the close of nominations. However, they were only able to vote on ballot papers with below-the-line voting options for the region, 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 used during that period were printed on-site at election offices.

There were 912,967 votes cast at early voting centres prior to Election Day, 67.90% more than the number of votes cast at early voting centres in 2010 and 233.26% more than 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 44 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 early voting centres, the majority of which involved a change of usual location.

Operating hours at early voting centres at both airports were extended to ensure they met major flight departure times. At Melbourne Airport, operating hours were 5.00 am to 10.00 pm from Monday 17 to Thursday 27 November and until 6.00 pm on Friday 28 November.

At Avalon Airport, operating hours were 5.00 am to 8.00 pm from Monday 17 November to Thursday 27 November and until 6.00 pm on Friday 28 November. Operating hours also included the weekend of 22 and 23 November at both airports.

The VEC ran a pilot model during early voting whereby six of the early voting centres were designated as ‘fully accessible supercentres’. Voting amenities, services and resources at these centres were fully accessible to electors with a varying range of abilities. Services included Auslan interpreters, CCTV, and electronically-assisted voting.

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 6.

Mobile Early Voting

The Electoral Commissioner has the authority to appoint certain establishments 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 1,106 mobile early voting centres appointed for the 2014 State election, compared with 986 locations in 2010. Some venues requested postal voting services only and 989 requested a mobile voting team to visit. Netbooks were used at mobile voting centres and 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.

Figure 14: Votes cast prior to Election Day, Victorian State elections, 2006-2014
Interstate and Overseas Voting

Early voting was available at 11 interstate and 32 overseas locations. A total of 12,872 votes were returned from outside Victoria during the 2014 State election (see Appendix 12 for Interstate Voting Centres and Appendix 13 for Overseas Voting Centres). This is almost 20% more than in 2010 (10,758) and 2006 (10,805).

![Figure 15: Votes taken at interstate and overseas locations, Victorian State elections, 2006-2014](image)

Early Voting by Post

Electors unable to attend a voting centre on Election Day could access a postal vote by:

- collecting a postal vote application form from any post office in Victoria
- collecting an application 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.

Most postal vote applications were scanned and processed electronically, which eliminated labour-intensive handling of paper applications and helped to ensure the efficient delivery of ballot packs. Applications that could not be scanned were processed manually. 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.

The VEC again established an email ballot material service for the 2014 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, and provide 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 2,603 emailed ballot packs were despatched during the election compared to 1,212 at the 2010 State election.

Once the initial backlog of postal vote applications was cleared (two working days), the VEC endeavoured to process all further postal vote applications on the day they were received by the VEC.

As occurred at the 2010 State election, some electors who applied for a postal vote also voted at an early voting centre prior to receiving their ballot packs. The use of Netbooks at all early voting centres enabled 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 the ‘Express Post’ network for delivery of election material in the week prior to Election Day. This helped ensure that material was delivered in sufficient time for electors to complete and return their ballot material.

All processed postal vote applications were made available electronically to election offices (as a scanned image) progressively as they were processed. From the Monday prior to Election Day an elector’s declaration could be quickly checked against that elector’s signature on the scanned image of the postal vote application. As a result, a high proportion of postal votes were included in the count on election night.

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. Nineteen votes were returned by Antarctic electors and included in the count.

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 a General Postal Voter. By registering as a General Postal Voter, electors automatically receive ballot papers in the mail for all State elections and local government elections. There were 54,370 (1.43% of enrolment) General Postal Voters registered for the 2014 State election, a slight decrease proportionally on 2010.
Electronically Assisted Voting

The legislation that governs electronic voting in Victoria is found in section 100 and Part 6A of the Electoral Act 2002 (the Act) and Part 5 of the Electoral Regulations 2012. Electronically assisted voting (EAV) has been available at Victorian State elections since 2006. In 2010, EAV was available during the early voting period within Victoria, interstate and in the United Kingdom.

At the 2014 Victorian State election, EAV was again provided during the early voting period and was available to eligible electors within Victoria and to Victorian electors in the United Kingdom. The VEC deployed a completely new voting system created in-house by local and overseas expert developers. The new system is the first of its kind to provide end-to-end independently verifiable EAV, and fully open service software.

For the 2014 State election, a touchscreen tablet-based voting system was deployed, providing a secure, secret, voting session with a range of functions that allowed electors who are blind or have low vision, motor skill impairment, or insufficient literacy skills (whether in the English language or the elector’s primary spoken language) to vote independently.

For blind electors, or those who could not operate a touchscreen (or preferred not to), the voting system provided audio guidance and took commands via the blackened tablet screen or tactile phone type keypad overlaid on the screen. Voting was available in English and 19 other languages: Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Croatian, Dari, Greek, Italian, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Persian, Russian, Serbian, Somali, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese. Some audio support was also available in other languages.

Electors who voted electronically were marked off the roll by an election official and provided with a printed candidate list for their district and region. The candidate list is a new security feature forming part of the system’s end-to-end verifiability. The elector placed the candidate list under a scanner in order to commence the voting session. A number of configurable options were available at this stage including language, print and audio settings.

The elector then moved through the voting session, voting first for the relevant district then the region. When completing a region vote the elector could choose to vote above-the-line for a particular group or below-the-line for five or more candidates. It was not mandatory to vote formally. However, the system would alert the elector if they were about to make an informal vote, and would accept the vote as informal if the voter indicated that was their intention.

On completion of the vote the elector was able to review their vote to confirm that they had voted as intended. Changes could be made at this stage. Once the elector was satisfied with their vote it was submitted and transferred to the VEC. On successful transmission a receipt automatically printed for the elector as a record of their vote. The receipt could be compared to the original candidate list to confirm that the VEC had recorded exactly how they voted. The receipt could be taken from the voting centre, but the candidate lists could not.

The elector could then further check their receipt on the VEC website. The receipt did not display how the voter voted, and could not be linked to the elector’s identity. However, the website showed the elector that the VEC had an exact copy of the same voting receipt. The website also offered public audit trails from the system that provided independent evidence that electronic voting has operated securely and that all receipts from all electors were present.

After 6.00 pm on election night, the collected receipts were decrypted to reveal the votes, reconciled and printed ready for despatch to their relevant electorate for counting in the week after Election Day.

Although the EAV solution used electronics in the capture and recording of votes, there were a number of checkpoints available that provided a means to independently confirm the system performed as expected. These were:

- End-to-end voting observation – observation of the passage of votes from the elector being marked on the roll to the central printout of electronically cast votes and distribution to election offices.
- Real time election management – observation of the process of running and supporting the election including reports and information emitted from the system in real time.
- System verification outputs were made available on the VEC website by way of a publicly accessible record of all key technical data (except the votes themselves) daily during the election. The data could be independently checked to verify a range of critical functions of the system such as ballot generation, encryption and after the election, decryption. After close of polls, the collected votes were also made available for all districts and regions where there were adequate numbers so as not to pose a privacy risk.
- Reports and analyses commissioned by the VEC from independent experts (available on the VEC website).

At the close of early voting 1,121 votes had been cast electronically compared to 961 in 2010.
The average formality rate in 2014 for votes cast electronically was 97.40% for district votes and 98.84% for region votes compared to the overall total for all districts (paper and electronic votes counted) of 93.01% and 93.0% for all regions. This is slightly lower than in 2010 when the overall formality rate was 99%. A total of 17.04% of region votes cast electronically were completed below-the-line. By contrast, an average of 6.10% of all region votes (paper and electronic) were cast below-the-line.

Two independent surveys of users indicate that the EAV solution provided at the 2014 State election was considered to be a success. Forty-six electors who used EAV services in London were surveyed at random in face-to-face interviews as they exited the voting location. A smaller number of electors in Victoria who voted electronically left their details with the VEC so that they could be interviewed by telephone after the election.

When electors were questioned about the ease of use of the system, their comprehension of the messaging during the voting process, the tasks relevant to the verification printed lists, and the duration of the voting process, more than 80% reported they were satisfied or very satisfied. This was comparable to, or better than the findings in 2010, and pleasing considering the new steps introduced with the verification processes in 2014. Of the open ended questions asked of the London electors, almost all answers were positive about this system. Overall, this is an important finding that shows independent verification is not an impost on electors when voting electronically.

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Figure 17: Electronically assisted votes, Victorian State elections, 2006-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18: Voters accessing electronically assisted voting (vVote), by region, 2014 Victorian State election

Assistance for Voters with Special Circumstances

Along with the availability of electronically assisted voting in English and 19 other languages, voting instructions in a range of languages were printed on the voter-facing side of voting screens. The VEC’s online registration facility again included questions about foreign language fluency, for people seeking election work. The number of staff identifying as having skills in language/s in addition to English increased from 2,931 in 2010 to 3,780 in 2014. The VEC’s personnel system enabled Election Managers to identify election staff with language skills relevant to locations within an electorate.

Publishing key election information in accessible formats including Easy English is a major commitment outlined in the VEC’s Disability Action Plan. The VEC published an Easy English Guide to the 2014 State Election, which was extremely popular.

Electoral information in 20 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 an event and an option for the caller to request the services of an interpreter.

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 also provided on the VEC website.

Additional Voting Services

The VEC is committed to ensuring maximum accessibility to voting. An analysis was conducted to identify any key events that were scheduled to occur on Saturday 29 November, so that suitable voting services could be provided for electors attending these events.

The VEC contacted the organisers of these events to coordinate information for participants, examine opportunities to advertise in relevant publications, or in some instances to provide information regarding voting centres close to the events.
Major events catered for included the Corporate Games, Great Victorian Bike Ride, Queenscliff Music Festival, Wedderburn Christmas Festival, Harvest ‘N’ Graze Festival, Bright Food Music Wine, Frankston’s Christmas Festival of Lights, Albert Park Paspaley Polo in the City, The Alpine Challenge - Alpine National Park, Earthcore Music Festival Pyalong, Daylesford Agricultural Show, RACV Energy Breakthrough Maryborough, Paradise Music Festival Marysville and Mt Eliza Yoga Retreat.

Voting Trends

The number of electors has increased by 13.49% since 2006. Trends in voting behaviour do not correlate directly with this level of growth. Over the past three Victorian State elections (and in other States) substantial increases have been observed in the number and proportion of electors voting early and by post.

At the 2014 State election, almost 913,000 people voted early in person compared with around 543,000 in 2010 and 273,000 in 2006. This represents a 233% increase in actual numbers and a 193% increase as a proportion of turnout since 2006. When compared with the early voting figures at the 2002 state election, these increases are 407% and 331% respectively.

The number of electors voting by post has increased by 18.95% since 2010 and 51.36% since 2006. Almost 50,000 more voters used postal voting at the 2014 State election than in 2010. As a proportion of turnout, this represents 8.32% of voters using postal voting at the 2014 State election compared with 7.44% in 2010 and 6.26% in 2006.

The proportion of electors voting outside their electorate on Election Day (absent voters) has marginally decreased since 2006, with actual numbers of absent voters increasing by around 10 percent.

The number of provisional voters has increased. Though still a comparatively small number (37,622) the proportion has grown from 0.86% of voters in 2010 to 1.06% in 2014. Figure 19 shows the number of votes counted by vote type for Victorian State elections 2006-2014. Figure 20 shows the vote types as a proportion of total votes counted.