Lower House Count

2010 State Election Information Series
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Introduction

There are 88 members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly (Lower House) and each member represents one electoral district. Full preferential voting applies for the Lower House and electors must number all the boxes on their district ballot paper in the order of their choice. A guide to ballot paper formality for the Lower House is included in Appendix 1.

The VEC will establish approximately 1,800 voting centres across Victoria to facilitate voting on election day and will establish approximately 140 early voting centres within Victoria, at interstate venues and at overseas locations.

The VEC will provide mobile voting services at approximately 900 venues in the two weeks before election day to enable those in aged care facilities, hospitals, homeless agencies and prisons the opportunity to vote.

Accordingly, votes for one district could come from more than 2,500 voting locations across Victoria, from interstate and overseas.

In addition, the VEC is expecting to process in excess of 250,000 postal vote applications from electors who are unable to attend a voting centre on election day. Completed postal votes are returned to a central location for recording and are then distributed to election offices for counting. It is expected that the majority of postal votes will be returned to election offices by election day so that counts may commence on election night.

Fifty-six Election Managers are appointed to oversee the conduct of elections for one or two Lower House districts. Election Managers will be responsible for consolidating all votes cast for their electorate and conducting the scrutiny, count and declaration for each district election.

This document outlines the process that the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) will follow in conducting the count for Victoria’s 88 Lower House districts at the 2010 Victorian State election.

Count overview

After the close of voting at 6.00pm on election day, ordinary votes issued in election day voting centres will be counted in voting centres. The primary (first preference) and two-candidate-preferred (2CP) counts for the Lower House will take place first followed by the primary count for the Upper House.

Counting of postal votes will commence at 6.00pm on election night in district election offices and will be conducted in the same count order as at the voting centres. Counting of early votes will commence on Sunday after election day and will continue until all early votes received have been counted. Absent votes will be counted following the completion of the declaration exchange from Tuesday after election day, once these votes are returned to the relevant district office.

Electronic votes cast via the VEC’s electronically assisted voting facilities at early and mobile voting venues, will be decrypted and printed at a central VEC location after 6.00pm on election night. These ballot papers will be included in the declaration exchange and will be despatched to their home election office on Monday 29 November.
All primary and 2CP counts for early, postal, absent, provisional and marked as voted votes for the Lower House will take place in district election offices. A full recheck of all Lower House ballot papers will take place in each district election office commencing Monday after election day.

Where preference distributions are required they will commence Monday 6 December. It is anticipated that if a recount is necessary, this will commence on Tuesday 7 December.

Scrutineers
Candidates may appoint scrutineers to observe all counting processes in voting centres and at election offices. Scrutineers must submit to the person in charge at the counting venue, a completed appointment form, which has been signed by the candidate. Each form must contain the candidate’s original signature, faxed signatures will not be accepted. The Election Manager can provide candidates with copies of these forms, or alternatively, they can be downloaded from the VEC website at www.vec.vic.gov.au

Candidates may appoint one scrutineer for every election official involved in the counting of ballot papers. Election Managers will advise candidates of counting times and the number of election officials expected to be involved in the count.

The VEC has published a handbook for scrutineers which outlines their role and responsibilities. Election Managers will have copies of the handbook and they are also available on the VEC website at www.vec.vic.gov.au

Detailed count process

Voting Centres – Election night
District ballot papers completed by electors in voting centres on election day will be sorted and counted in each voting centre following the close of voting at 6.00pm on election night.

These counts will include primary (first preference) results for each candidate and a two-candidate-preferred count (2CP). The 2CP count involves the distribution of preferences to the two candidates considered most likely to be in the lead after a distribution of preferences. The Electoral Commissioner selects two candidates in each district for this purpose. The 2CP count provides an early indication of the result of the election.

Voting centre managers will phone primary and 2CP results through to election offices where they will be entered into VEC’s computerised election management system (EMS), transmitted to the tallyroom and posted on the VEC’s website.

In situations where the two candidates selected do not turn out to be the two leading candidates, the two-candidate-preferred counts will be redone after election day.

Election Offices – Primary and 2CP counts
All primary and 2CP counts for absent, early, postal and provisional votes will be conducted in district election offices commencing on election night and continuing during the week following election day. Primary and 2CP count results will continue to be entered into the VEC’s election management system and posted on the VEC’s website.
After the close of voting on election night, *postal* vote counts will take place in each election office. In addition, completed ballot papers from early voting centres and mobile voting teams will be sorted according to the district and region they belong. They will be reconciled and packaged ready for despatch to their home election office via the declaration exchange.

On Sunday following election day, all *absent*, *provisional* and *early* votes will be sorted and packaged ready for collection from each district office on Monday morning. These votes will be taken to the VEC warehouse (declaration exchange) where they will be sorted and despatched to their home election office.

The admissibility of *provisional* declarations will be determined by the VEC’s enrolment branch before return to their home electorate – from Tuesday 30 November.

*Primary* counts for *early* votes will take place in district election offices from Sunday 28 November and will continue during the following week when further *early* votes are received from other electorates via the declaration exchange. *Primary* counts for *absent* and *provisional* votes will also take place during this period.

The Election Manager is able to provide candidates and scrutineers with consolidated reports for *primary* and 2CP counts. The results will also be posted progressively on the VEC website.

The proposed timetable for the conduct of Lower House counts is included in Appendix 2 and an overview of the Lower House counting process is included in Appendix 3.

**District rechecks**

All ballot papers from voting centres and *absent*, *early*, *postal* and *provisional* vote parcels will be rechecked in Election Offices for correct counting and sorting. Rechecks will commence from Monday 29 November and will continue until Monday 6 December. Rechecked results will be entered progressively into the VEC’s election management system and will be published on the VEC website. Primary results for a district will no longer be displayed on the website once a recheck commences for that district.

It is not uncommon for minor variations in sorting and counting to be identified during the rechecking process. The Election Manager can provide candidates and scrutineers with a consolidated report of rechecked results and consolidated recheck results will be published on the VEC website.

**Torn ballot papers**

It is not unusual to find district ballot papers during the counting and rechecking process that have been torn by the elector. Where the integrity of these ballot papers has been maintained and all other formality rules have been met, the ballot paper is admitted to the count.

Where the integrity of the ballot paper has not been maintained, the torn paper is put aside as *informal*.

Election officials will note the number of torn ballot papers (if any) within each informal total.

The integrity of a ballot paper is maintained if all candidate names, party affiliations, and the elector’s preferences can be identified.
Absolute majority
In order to be elected for the Lower House, a candidate must achieve an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the formal vote. If a candidate has achieved an absolute majority after first preferences have been counted, the Election Manager will declare that candidate elected.

If no candidate has achieved an absolute majority or is not likely to achieve an absolute majority after all first preferences have been counted, the Election Manager will arrange for a preference distribution to be conducted.

District preference distributions
If a preference distribution is required, the Election Manager will advise all candidates of the time and place that the preference distribution will take place. It is expected that preference distributions will take place on Monday 6 December, as this is the last day for postal votes to be included in the count.

Before the preference distribution commences, the Election Manager will amalgamate all first preference ballot papers for each candidate from the rechecked parcels of votes. The total ballot papers will be confirmed after amalgamation to ensure that it matches the total ballot papers from all rechecked voting centre/ballot paper packages.

There are usually 6-10 election officials involved in a preference distribution who work under the guidance of a team leader.

During a preference distribution:
- the candidate with the lowest number of first preference votes is excluded, and that candidate’s votes are distributed to the remaining candidates according to the second preferences on the ballot papers;
- the total votes received by the remaining candidates during the distribution are added to their first preference totals and a further check is conducted to see if any candidate has achieved an absolute majority;
- if no majority is achieved, the candidate with the lowest progressive total is excluded next, and their votes are distributed to the remaining candidates according to the next available preference;
- the process of excluding the lowest candidate and distributing that candidate’s votes to the remaining candidates continues until one candidate has an absolute majority of votes, and is declared elected.

A sample report showing the result of a preference distribution is included in Appendix 4.

Recounts
Following the calculation of the result, but before a candidate has been declared elected, a recount may be conducted at the election manager’s discretion, at the request of a candidate or if directed by the Commission.

A recount involves:
- a complete recheck of each ballot paper for correct formality and sorting;
• a full recount of first preference votes for each candidate and informal; and
• a full preference distribution following the rechecking and recounting of first preference votes.

During a recount the Electoral Commissioner rules on all disputed ballot papers.

The VEC aims to achieve an accuracy of 99.98% via its counting and rechecking processes and has a proven track record of achieving at least this. Accordingly as a general guide, a recount will only take place if the margin at a critical exclusion is less than 8 votes.

**Declaration of result**

Once the result of the election is determined, and it is clear that no outstanding votes can affect the result, the Election Manager will arrange to formally declare the result of the election.

The Election Manager will advise all candidates of the time and location for the declaration.

It is expected that Lower House declaration ceremonies will take place between Friday 3 and Monday 13 December 2010.

**Two-party-preferred counts**

The VEC prepares *two-party-preferred* statistics following each State election. The purpose of the *two-party-preferred* vote is to show, for each electorate and for the State as a whole, how the vote is divided between the ALP and the Liberal and National Parties, taking into account the preferences of people who vote for minor parties and independents.

In districts where a preference distribution is conducted to determine the result, where the distribution continues until only two candidates are left in the count, and where the final distribution is between a Labor and a Liberal/National candidate, the final result of the preference distribution will be used for the *two-party-preferred* vote. There were 32 such districts at the 2006 election.

In districts where a preference distribution is not conducted or cannot be used (because there were more than two candidates still in the count when the result was determined, or because the distribution was not between a Labor and a Liberal/National candidate), the *two-candidate—preferred* count will be used for the *two-party-preferred* votes as long as the *two-party-preferred* count was between Labor and Liberal/National. There were 48 such districts at the 2006 election.

In districts where neither the preference distribution nor the *two-candidate-preferred* count is between a Labor and a Liberal/National candidate, a special *two-party-preferred* count will be conducted. Election Managers will conduct these counts in their offices once all other counting responsibilities have been completed. Candidates will be notified when these counts will be conducted. There were eight special *two-candidate-preferred* counts conducted for the 2006 election.
Appendix 1 – Guide to Lower House formality

- Each ballot paper must have a number 1 in, or adjacent to, or level with one box.
- All boxes should be numbered using the full sequence of numbers as indicated on the ballot paper. The only exception is where one box is left blank and would logically have contained the last preference, e.g. with 6 candidates, the number 6 may be omitted.
- More than one box left blank makes the vote informal.
- Any duplication or omission of a number from the sequence makes the vote informal.
- Numbers next to, or on the other side of the names, are acceptable providing the voter’s intention is clear.
- Amendments are acceptable providing the voter’s intention is clear. All other marks are to be ignored.
- The number ‘0’ (zero) makes the vote informal. It is outside the range of numbers indicated in the instructions on the ballot paper.
- Poorly formed numbers must be considered in the context of the whole ballot paper and are acceptable if they can reasonably be construed as numbers comprising part of the sequence.
- Unconventional but recognisable numbers such as continental 1s and 7s are acceptable. Roman numerals are also acceptable if numbers are clearly represented in this format. Other ‘non-english’ characters are not acceptable. Numbers may be written, one, two etc., but only in English.

Sample only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONE</th>
<th>SEVEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Ticks, crosses, As, Bs etc are not acceptable as indicators of preference.
- A ballot paper that has not been initialled by an election official is not excluded for that reason alone provided it is printed on VEC official security paper.
The numbers are consecutive.

Roman numerals are acceptable.

The number '0' makes it informal.

The correction is clear.

The numbers are consecutive.
Ballot Paper

District

Number the boxes 1 to 7 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.

7 Candidate 1
✓ Candidate 2
2 Candidate 3
3 Candidate 4
4 Candidate 5
5 Candidate 6
6 Candidate 7

Fold the ballot paper and put it in ballot box or declaration envelope as appropriate.

Torn ballot papers

INFORMAL
There is no number '1'

FORMAL
The correction is clear

INFORMAL
More than one square has been left blank

FORMAL
In the context of all the other numbers it is clearly the '4' that is missing.
Election officials from time to time may come across ballot papers that have been torn. The following guidelines apply when dealing with torn ballot papers.

If different parts of a ballot paper can be identified beyond doubt as having originated from the same ballot paper, the pieces may be attached using tape and counted as 1 ballot paper.

1. Formality

A torn ballot paper can only be ruled “formal” if the integrity of the ballot paper has remained intact and all formality requirements have otherwise been met. The integrity of the ballot paper is considered to be complete if the names of all candidates, their affiliations and in the case of the Legislative Council, their locality are clearly visible on the torn paper.

In situations where the ballot paper has been torn across one of the boxes for recording preferences, the ballot paper may still be deemed formal if the preference recorded in the box can be determined, and the integrity of the ballot paper is otherwise intact.

See examples below for illustrations of these principles.

Legislative Assembly

Informal: Even though all the preferences are discernable the integrity of the ballot paper has been compromised as candidates’ details are missing.

Formal: The integrity of the ballot paper is intact and the preferences can be determined taking the whole ballot paper into account.

Formal: The full list of candidates and their affiliations are intact maintaining the integrity of the paper. As long as the paper can be identified as being printed by the VEC the removal of the official’s initials does not make the ballot paper informal.
### Appendix 2 – Lower House count timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Ordinary Votes-Primary &amp; 2CP</th>
<th>Early Votes-Primary &amp; 2CP</th>
<th>Postal Votes-Primary &amp; 2CP</th>
<th>Absent Votes-Primary &amp; 2CP</th>
<th>Provisional Votes-Primary &amp; 2CP</th>
<th>Preference Distributions (99 in 46) and Recounts (31 in 94)</th>
<th>2CP where incorrect (2 in 2006)</th>
<th>PP where required (5 in 2006)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 27 November</td>
<td>Election Day</td>
<td>Counted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commence</td>
<td>Secondary and postal districts for each district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday 28 November</td>
<td>Sorting materials for dec exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commence - non districts</td>
<td>Sorting other districts - for dec exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 29 November</td>
<td>Collection and exchange of items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commence - non districts</td>
<td>Sorting other districts - for dec exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 30 November</td>
<td>Recount items from dec exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006 invoices</td>
<td>2PP where required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 1 December</td>
<td>All recounts of lower house voting centre ballot papers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ROs commence recounting votes</td>
<td>2006 invoices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 2 December</td>
<td>Conduct further early primary, 2CP and recount counts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006 invoices</td>
<td>2PP where required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 3 December</td>
<td>Region papers: 1st pick up from metro offices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006 invoices</td>
<td>2PP where required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
1. All primary counts will be followed by a 2CP distribution.
2. A recheck of all ballot papers will be conducted for each district.
3. 2CP results will not be adjusted after recounts are conducted - therefore there may be some minor variation between 2CP and recheck totals.
Appendix 3 – Lower House count overview

ELECTION OFFICE

Primary counts
↓
Two-candidate preferred
↓
Rechecks
↓
Amalgamation
↓
Preference Distribution
↓
(Recounts)
↓
(Two-party preferred)
↓
Declarations

VEC – Declaration Exchange
Absent and early votes
Postal votes
Electronic votes
Provisional votes

Absent and early votes for other districts and provisional votes for checking sent to VEC

VEC – Central Processing Centre
Postal votes
Postal and Early votes from Interstate and Overseas voting centres

Absent, early & postal votes from other districts, electronic, and checked provisional votes sent to election offices.

Early Voting Centres
Early votes from early voting centres including mobiles

Absent and early votes for other districts and provisional votes returned to election office

Voting Centres
Primary and 2CP counts for ordinary votes.

Absent & Provisional votes returned to election office
Appendix 4 - Sample preference distribution report

Distribution of Preference Votes
State Election 2006
Kilsyth District

Total valid first preference votes polled for all candidates 34611
Number of votes required to constitute an absolute majority on first count 17306
Number of informal votes 1412

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates Names (in ballot-paper order)</th>
<th>SCHWAB, Gillian</th>
<th>BEARD, Dympna</th>
<th>CRAIG, Salore</th>
<th>HILL, Patsy</th>
<th>HODGETT, David</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total first preference votes recorded for each candidate</td>
<td>2332</td>
<td>13458</td>
<td>2982</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>15097</td>
<td>34611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of 742 ballot-papers of HILL, Patsy (1st excluded candidate)</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>330</td>
<td></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Total</td>
<td>2448</td>
<td>13608</td>
<td>3312</td>
<td></td>
<td>15243</td>
<td>34611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of 2448 ballot-papers of SCHWAB, Gillian (2nd excluded candidate)</td>
<td></td>
<td>714</td>
<td>444</td>
<td></td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>2448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>14322</td>
<td>3756</td>
<td></td>
<td>16533</td>
<td>34611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of 3756 ballot-papers of CRAIG, Salore (3rd excluded candidate)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2861</td>
<td></td>
<td>895</td>
<td>3756</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL TOTAL</td>
<td>17183</td>
<td></td>
<td>17428</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34611</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name of ELECTED candidate: HODGETT, David