

# Referendum Report **2023**



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# About this report

This report provides a comprehensive overview of how the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) planned, prepared for, and delivered, the 2023 referendum.

There are 15 sections in this report:

**Commissioner's overview** – The Electoral Commissioner reflects on the preparation for and delivery of the event

**Referendum fast facts** – a summary of key dates, statistics, and outcomes

1. **Trust and the electoral integrity journey** – the operating environment that impacted on the preparation and delivery of the referendum
2. **Legislation** – the legislative settings that underpinned the referendum question and delivery of the event
3. **Referendum readiness** – the work that went into preparing for the referendum
4. **Engagement and participation** – the community engagement and education activities undertaken to ensure all eligible Australians could participate in the referendum
5. **Yes/No pamphlet** – how the pamphlet was prepared and distributed

6. **Regulation and security** – regulation of referendum material authorisations and physical and cyber security arrangements

7. **Staffing and training** – how the AEC recruited and trained its referendum workforce

8. **Service offering** – the services provided by the AEC, the service standards we committed to and our performance against these commitments

9. **Voting** – how and where Australians voted at the referendum

10. **Processing the results** – counting the votes and tallying the result

11. **After the referendum** – multi-voters and non-voters, funding, and disclosure

**Reader guides** – abbreviations and acronyms, glossary.

**Appendices**

## Tools to assist readers

This publication has:

- a table of contents
- a list of figures and tables
- an alphabetical index
- cross references
- links to online resources
- an abbreviations and acronyms section
- a glossary

A PDF version of this report is available at [aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/Publications](https://aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications)

# Commissioner's overview



This report provides a comprehensive overview of how the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) planned, prepared for, and delivered, the 2023 referendum. While this was Australia's 45<sup>th</sup> referendum since Federation, it was also the first federal referendum in almost a quarter of a century, and this report will therefore become an important artefact for future referendum delivery.

The report outlines the challenges the AEC faced in delivering the referendum: statistically, Australia's largest ever electoral event. The following pages chronicle our approach to ensuring administration of the referendum was transparent, impartial, robust, and effective, so that all eligible Australians were able to exercise their democratic rights.

## 1999 and 2023 – different worlds

It was 1999 when Australians last voted in a federal referendum. At that event, it had only been 11 years since our last referendum, there were 12.3 million Australians on the electoral roll, and just 20 per cent of people voting in 1999 were voting in a referendum for the first time. The world wide web was not quite a decade old, only 22 per cent of Australians were 'online', and we were still using dial-up internet with download speeds of around 100 kilobits per second. While mobile phones were just taking off and we were discovering the new language of SMS, many of us still bought hard copy newspapers and routinely watched the nightly news.

Fast forward to 2023 and Australia is far more dynamic. There are now 17.6 million of us on the electoral roll, with 47 per cent of electors having never voted in a referendum before, including nearly 6.7 million citizens who have turned 18 since the 1999 referendum and an additional 1.7 million new citizens. Almost 90 per cent of Australia's population is now online with download speeds of nearly 100 megabits per second, and with just under 50 per cent of our online activity (including about 41 per cent of our news consumption) undertaken using mobile devices. We now operate in a technology and information ecosystem where information, sometimes including mis and disinformation, is delivered to us non-stop and via a vast array of non-traditional news sources. Our world has changed dramatically, and this brings with it new challenges in ensuring our democratic institutions and processes remain relevant, robust and trusted.

## Trust

Electoral service delivery has grown significantly more complex in recent years. While our global, 24/7, open information ecosystem has countless benefits, it can also make it difficult for voters to discern factual, and authoritative sources of information from false or misleading information. Due to the exponential growth of digital information and communication technologies, and mis and disinformation questioning the integrity of electoral processes, Australians' trust in electoral processes can no longer be taken for granted.

Australia is facing several new and evolving threats to the perceived and actual integrity of the electoral system, which could impact trust in electoral results and democracy at large. Of particular

concern to the AEC was the recent, observable increase in mis and disinformation and conspiracy theories about electoral processes and the AEC.

It was in this environment that the AEC worked to ensure Australians understood the process of participating in a referendum and that they could trust the electoral process and the results. Maintaining this trust is a critical part of the AEC's role in defending Australia's democracy and the AEC developed various strategies to maintain electoral integrity and voter trust in electoral processes in the lead up to and during the referendum.

In 2023 the AEC matured its inaugural 2021 *Reputation Management Strategy* to establish a more fulsome *Reputation Management System (RMS)*, which was designed to focus AEC staff on maintaining public trust and the integrity of electoral processes. Critically, operational excellence and robust and impartial event delivery is the foundation of the AEC's approach to reputation management.

A further key focus of the RMS involved positioning the AEC as the go-to expert and authoritative source of information on Australian federal electoral processes. Our broad approach for the referendum was to proactively 'flood the zone' with truthful electoral information to ensure voters had access to accurate information about the process of voting and the administration of the event. We did this through several key initiatives, including an extensive public information advertising campaign, which achieved unprecedented reach to voters, with over one billion impressions on digital and social channels and 6.5 million click throughs to the AEC website.

We took a proactive approach to social media management, posting engaging and fact-based social media content on the electoral process. The ongoing publication of our Disinformation Register ensured Australians could identify disinformation on electoral processes and our 'Stop and Consider' advertising campaign encouraged voters to think critically about sources of electoral information.

The Defending Democracy Unit, established prior to the 2022 federal election, oversaw referendum integrity, counter interference initiatives, and worked closely with online media platforms and other government agencies through the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce to monitor potential threats to integrity, including cyber or physical security incidents and foreign interference.

These initiatives provided Australians with timely and easy access to correct information on the electoral process and helped ensure the AEC was able to deliver a high integrity referendum with results the Australian public trusted. The AEC's research shows that nine in ten Australians surveyed were confident in the AEC's ability to deliver referendum voting services. The recently published Australian Public Service Commission's (APSC) [Survey of Trust in Australian public services](#) indicates the AEC has the highest levels of trust and satisfaction amongst Australian Public Service (APS) agencies.

## Legislation

The AEC maintains impartial electoral systems and processes for elections, referendums, plebiscites, and by-elections in accordance with two key pieces of legislation: the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act) and the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* (the Referendum Act). This legislation guides our planning and delivery of electoral events.

A range of amendments to the Referendum Act (2023) were passed to bring the legislation broadly in line with the Electoral Act. This allowed the AEC to deliver an event that had the look and feel of a federal election, with one key difference being the additional time (20 days in total) provided to the AEC to run polling services in remote Australia.

## Referendum readiness

Through the AEC's election readiness framework, the AEC engages in a variety of readiness activities, usually over a three-year cycle, to track and assess the level of readiness required to deliver a robust, independent, and impartial electoral event.

This process plays a critical part in ensuring electoral events are delivered on time, to a high standard, and produce results that the Australian public has trust and confidence in. While usually a three-year timeframe, the AEC adapted this framework to prepare and mobilise for the 2023 referendum over a 15-month period, following the 2022 federal election.

## Engagement and participation

Ensuring that all eligible citizens are aware of their democratic rights and responsibilities is one of the key elements of a high integrity electoral system. To that end, one of the ways the AEC ensures Australians can participate in electoral events is through education and public awareness programs. These programs are fundamental to increasing voter engagement and participation.

For the 2023 referendum, the AEC engaged in a range of education activities across the country, with a particular focus on people who needed additional support to be able to participate, including Indigenous and multicultural communities, voters in prison, and new citizens. This contributed to a very high level of engagement and participation in the referendum; including the highest enrolment rate in the history of federal electoral events in Australia, a record high Indigenous enrolment rate, a record high youth enrolment rate, and the enrolment of prisoners in an increased number of prisons.

Increased enrolment needs to translate into strong turnout and the casting of formal votes. Accordingly, with 47 per cent of enrolled voters having never participated in a referendum before, our education and communication campaign was designed to be comprehensive; including advertising, media partnerships, social media, and extensive engagement online. The campaign achieved unprecedented voter 'reach', including over 1 billion impressions of our advertisements on our digital and social channels, 110 million completed video views, 22.5 million impressions on our snapchat quiz, 6.5 million click-throughs to the AEC website, and 116,000 downloads of our first ever podcast series.

We engaged deeply with community leaders and local organisations to deliver targeted voter education, including over 380 community face to face and online education sessions in 42 languages. Online education materials were available in Easy Read, Auslan, and customised versions for people experiencing homelessness. Translated information was available in 34 international languages, 27 First Nations languages and Auslan, and we provided tailored information to Australian voters overseas.

## Yes/No pamphlet

The Yes/No pamphlet is a legislative requirement unique to a referendum. As set out in the Referendum Act, the AEC is required to translate, print, and distribute the Yes/No pamphlet which contains the cases for and against the proposed law to change the Constitution.

The AEC's approach to producing and distributing the Yes/No pamphlet was carefully considered and meticulously planned. In total, the AEC distributed over 12.8 million copies of the pamphlet throughout Australia. Additional pamphlets were also sent to historical, educational, and archival facilities, as well as to all voting locations overseas. We also produced versions of the pamphlet in translated and accessible formats, including international and First Nations languages, and a version for people who are blind or have low vision. A detailed description on the pamphlet is outlined in chapter 5.

## Regulation and security

The environment surrounding the 2023 referendum was different to that of any other electoral event in the AEC's history. Where campaigners at federal elections are usually party affiliated, the referendum involved many individuals and entities campaigning who would not usually do so. This meant an increased AEC focus on areas such as authorisations and funding and disclosure to ensure there were appropriate education, regulation, and compliance mechanisms in place.

The contested information and security environment presented the AEC with new risks and challenges, particularly regarding physical and cyber security, and the robustness of our information technology systems.

## Staffing and training

Staffing and training preparations commenced for the AEC long before the writ was issued. The AEC undertook a substantial program of development and upskilling of the workforce to increase the capability and agility of staff.

Extensive preparations were made to ensure the substantial cohort of Temporary Election Workforce (TEW) that are so vital to delivering a federal event, received adequate role specific training alongside operational, cultural, and neutrality training. A unique dimension of staffing for this event was the requirement for staff to confirm their issue neutrality. This considerable training effort helped to effectively manage the integrity and impartiality of all staff employed through the referendum.

The AEC also leveraged the skills and capacity of the APSC through a secondment program, drawing on APS staff who were then deployed across Australia in a range of operational roles.

We couldn't maintain our excellent reputation without our people. I am incredibly proud and grateful for the role AEC staff, secondees and our temporary election workforce played in the delivery of the 2023 referendum.

## Service offering

While voting – in and of itself – is a simple act, a mammoth effort is required behind the scenes to deliver what is one of Australia's most complex logistical events. The AEC has a proud history of providing the highest standard of electoral services and the 2023 referendum was no different.

Our focus on electoral integrity through our values of quality, agility and professionalism was at the core of our *2023 Referendum Service Plan*, which set out the five standards underpinning our service delivery throughout the event. The 2023 Voter Survey indicated we met all these standards with a high degree of operational excellence. Overall confidence in the voting system and the AEC remained consistent with the 2022 and 2019 elections.

We are also grateful to the broad range of service providers who assisted us in providing these high-quality services, including government agencies such as Services Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Austrade, and many commercial organisations providing print, logistical, security, storage, computer, postage, metrics, and scanning services.

## Voting

Throughout the referendum voting period, 15.9 million Australians were able to have their say - freely. This included 6.4 million people casting their vote before voting day (including approximately 98,000 via mobile polling), 1.7 million people voting by post and nearly 7.8 million people then casting their vote on voting day. More information about the range of voting options accessed for the referendum is outlined in chapter 9.

## Processing the results

At any electoral event, counting the vote is a complex and time pressured exercise, with the Australian public accustomed to receiving a result on voting night. However, this continues to be a challenge as the majority of votes are now cast prior to voting day, voters can effectively cast their votes anywhere in Australia (and overseas), votes must be returned to their 'owning' electoral division for counting, and there are legislative limits on how and when we can undertake the count of certain categories of votes. Of note, the AEC must wait 13 days for the return of declaration votes, such as postal votes, and if the result margin is close, the outstanding postal votes may be material in determining the final result.

Counting commenced across all states and territories immediately after the polls closed at 6pm (local time) and results were published to the Tally Room in real time. Just after 7pm (AEST), enough results had been released to give commentators the confidence to call the referendum result.

The AEC announced that a mathematically certain result had been reached on Friday 27 October 2023.

## After the referendum

One of the final tasks of a referendum is to address apparent cases of multi-voting and non-voting. While the overwhelming majority of Australians meet their voting obligations, a small percentage do not. Multiple-voting and non-voting are offences under the Referendum Act and the AEC's multiple and non-voter processes are a critical electoral integrity measure. Further post referendum activities are outlined in chapter 11.

The AEC is proud to have delivered the first referendum in 24 years with high integrity and professionalism. What follows is a precis of the various elements of this electoral event.

# Referendum fast facts

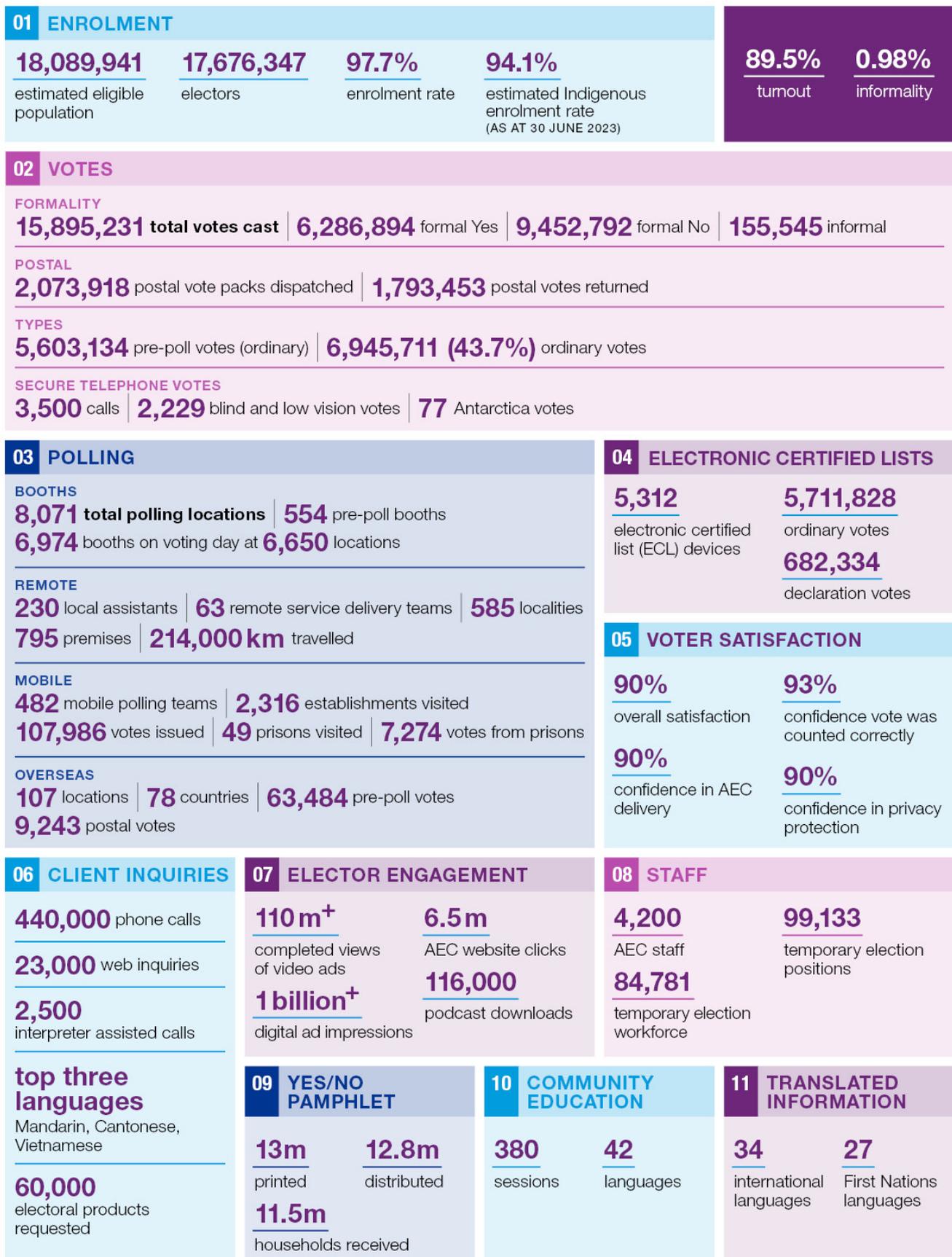
## Referendum timeline

Figure 1: Referendum timeline



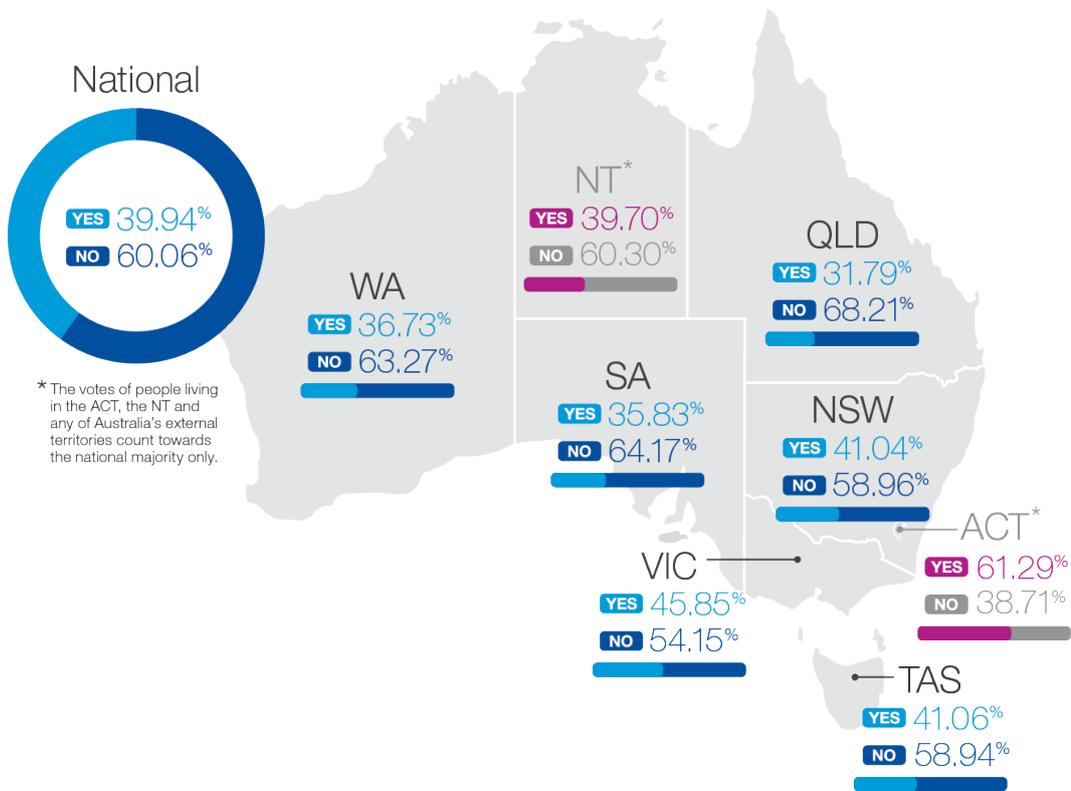
Figure 2: Key statistics

# 2023 referendum snapshot



# Referendum results

Figure 3: Referendum results



See: [National results](#) on the AEC's Tally Room for more information

# Referendum dates and results 1906–2023

**Table 1: Referendum dates and results 1906–2023**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Issue of writ</b>	<b>Polling Day</b>	<b>Result</b>
Senate elections	8 November 1906	12 December 1906	Carried
Finance	28 February 1910	13 April 1910	Not carried
State debts	28 February 1910	13 April 1910	Carried
Legislative powers	15 March 1911	26 April 1911	Not carried
Monopolies	15 March 1911	26 April 1911	Not carried
Trade and commerce	24 April 1913	31 May 1913	Not carried
Corporations	24 April 1913	31 May 1913	Not carried
Industrial matters	24 April 1913	31 May 1913	Not carried
Railway disputes	24 April 1913	31 May 1913	Not carried
Trusts	24 April 1913	31 May 1913	Not carried
Nationalisation of monopolies	24 April 1913	31 May 1913	Not carried
Military service*	N/A	28 October 1916	Not carried
Military service*	N/A	20 December 1917	Not carried
Legislative powers	3 November 1919	13 December 1919	Not carried
Nationalisation of monopolies	3 November 1919	13 December 1919	Not carried
Industry and commerce	26 July 1926	4 September 1926	Not carried
Essential services	26 July 1926	4 September 1926	Not carried
State debts	9 October 1928	17 November 1928	Carried
Aviation	4 February 1937	6 March 1937	Not carried
Marketing	4 February 1937	6 March 1937	Not carried
Democratic rights	4 July 1944	19 August 1944	Not carried
Social services	21 August 1946	28 September 1946	Carried
Organised marketing of primary products	21 August 1946	28 September 1946	Not carried
Industrial employment	21 August 1946	28 September 1946	Not carried
Rents and prices	12 April 1948	29 May 1948	Not carried

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Issue of writ</b>	<b>Polling Day</b>	<b>Result</b>
Powers to deal with communists and communism	10 August 1951	22 September 1951	Not carried
Parliament	28 April 1967	27 May 1967	Not carried
Enact laws for Aboriginals and include in population counts	28 April 1967	27 May 1967	Carried
Prices	12 November 1973	8 December 1973	Not carried
Incomes	12 November 1973	8 December 1973	Not carried
Simultaneous elections	20 April 1974	18 May 1974	Not carried
Mode of altering the constitution	20 April 1974	18 May 1974	Not carried
Democratic elections	20 April 1974	18 May 1974	Not carried
Local government bodies	20 April 1974	18 May 1974	Not carried
Simultaneous elections	27 April 1977	21 May 1977	Not carried
Senate casual vacancies	27 April 1977	21 May 1977	Carried
Referendums - Territories	27 April 1977	21 May 1977	Carried
Retirement of judges	27 April 1977	21 May 1977	Carried
National song*	27 April 1977	21 May 1977	Carried
Terms of senators	26 October 1984	1 December 1984	Not carried
Interchange of powers	26 October 1984	1 December 1984	Not carried
Parliamentary terms	25 July 1988	3 September 1988	Not carried
Fair elections	25 July 1988	3 September 1988	Not carried
Local government	25 July 1988	3 September 1988	Not carried
Rights and freedoms	25 July 1988	3 September 1988	Not carried
Republic	1 October 1999	6 November 1999	Not carried
Preamble	1 October 1999	6 November 1999	Not carried
Australian marriage law*	N/A	12 September – 7 November 2017	Carried
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice	11 September 2023	14 October 2023	Not carried

\*Plebiscite or postal survey

**See:** [Referendum dates and results](#) on the AEC website for more information

1

# Trust and the electoral integrity journey



## **Trust and the electoral integrity journey**

Public trust in the AEC is intrinsically linked to trust in Australian electoral processes and results, and maintaining this trust is a critical part of the AEC's role in defending Australia's democracy.

Overall, Australians trust their elections and referendums. However, Australia is facing several new and evolving threats to the perceived and actual integrity of electoral events, which could impact trust in electoral results and democracy at large.

Electoral service delivery has grown significantly more complex in recent years. Due to the exponential growth of digital information and communication technologies, mis and disinformation questioning the integrity of electoral processes, Australians' trust in electoral processes can no longer be taken for granted.

The AEC developed various strategies to maintain electoral integrity and voter trust in electoral processes in the lead up to and during the referendum.

# Trust

In many ways, trust is the foundation of democracy. It is citizens' trust in electoral processes that enables peaceful transitions of power, empowers elected representatives to form government, and facilitates democratic legitimacy. Trust in electoral processes and electoral management bodies (EMBs) is therefore vital for the functioning of a strong democracy.

AEC research shows that nine out of ten Australians trust the AEC, and experience shows that the AEC is respected both domestically and internationally for its excellence in electoral management. The recently published results of the APSC's [Survey of Trust in Australian public services](#) also demonstrated the AEC has the highest levels of trust and satisfaction amongst APS agencies. This trust and positive reputation are the result of many years of lawful, impartial, and transparent federal electoral events being delivered by the AEC.

## Operational excellence

Operational excellence is central to maintaining trust in the AEC, as it is the foundational factor influencing the AEC's reputation. All AEC principles, policies and standard operating procedures are designed with one common goal in mind – excellence in the operational delivery of federal electoral services for Australians, in accordance with the Electoral Act, the Referendum Act, and other relevant Commonwealth legislation.

Excellence does not come from one individual or team alone, and it does not happen overnight. It is AEC staff who ensure this excellence in electoral service delivery, and the agency undertakes a massive task to rapidly attract, onboard and train the over 100,000 Australians required to deliver a federal electoral event. These staff undertake hundreds of millions of transactions throughout an electoral event, and some are employed by the AEC for only a single day, compounding the complexity of this task. All AEC delivery teams, including corporate, enabling and governance functions, contribute to maintaining operational excellence.

## Complexity

Influenced by the exponential growth of digital information and communication technologies, electoral service delivery has grown exponentially more complex in recent years, and the AEC is now operating in a very different environment from when it first established in 1984, and when it delivered the last referendum in 1999.

The role and expectations of EMBs has expanded, and there has been a noticeable increase in criticism aimed at EMBs globally. In large-scale, manual events, mistakes can and do happen, but in recent times truly minor administrative errors are often seized upon by bad faith actors and used as justification to discredit the entire electoral process. These narratives can then quickly gain traction online, particularly on social media platforms where (sometimes misleading) headlines spread quickly. In this increasingly complex and polarised environment, even the highest standards of electoral service delivery are no longer sufficient to maintain public trust.

The AEC must continue to proactively and innovatively introduce measures to address these challenges, and be ready to respond to emerging electoral issues, as technology and the information ecosystem continue to evolve.

## Information environment

With access to an ever-increasing number of sources of news and information, as well as online platforms where content can be publicly and instantaneously shared from across the globe, Australians have a plethora of information available at their fingertips.

While this open information ecosystem has countless benefits, it can also make it difficult for voters to discern factual and authoritative sources of information from false or misleading information. Of particular concern to the AEC is the recent, observable increase in mis and disinformation and conspiracy theories about electoral processes and the AEC. This includes false narratives and unsubstantiated claims questioning the integrity of some processes such as postal voting.

The AEC has proactively developed new strategies to maintain voter trust in electoral processes. Fact-checking, de-bunking and pre-bunking electoral mis and disinformation, and uplifting education and communications products, are key to safeguarding the perceived and actual integrity of electoral events into the future. The AEC has an important role to play in upholding and encouraging ongoing trust in the integrity of Australian democracy.

## Electoral integrity journey

Alongside APS Values, the AEC values of electoral integrity through quality, agility and professionalism form a values and behaviour framework underpinning everything the AEC does, with the specific priority of ensuring electoral integrity.

Electoral integrity is crucial to maintaining public trust in Australian democratic processes, influencing the very stability and legitimacy of a democracy. However, it can be threatened by any interference in the electoral process, whether intentional or not. Defending the integrity of Australia's electoral processes is at the heart of all AEC activities.

Since being established in 1984, the AEC has developed extensive experience and expertise as a world leading EMB. As democracies worldwide are faced with new challenges, the AEC has developed various strategies to maintain electoral integrity and voter trust in electoral processes.

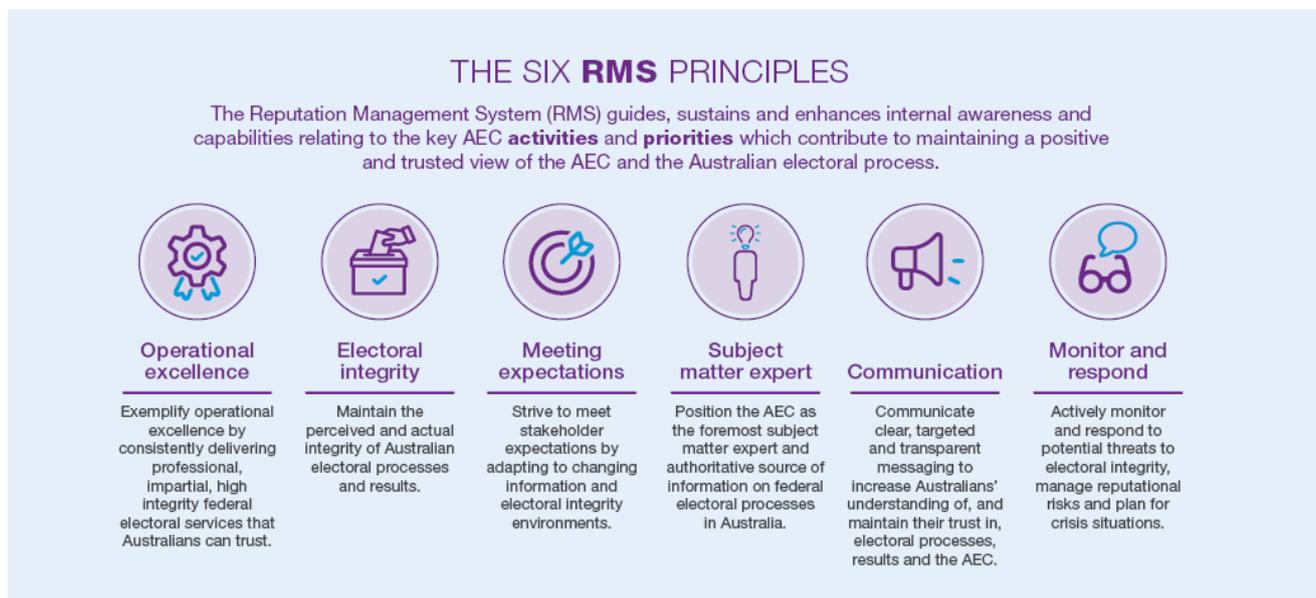
## Reputation Management System

In response to the evolving information environment and the resultant growing complexity of electoral delivery, in 2023 the AEC updated its inaugural 2021 *Reputation Management Strategy* to establish a more fulsome *Reputation Management System (RMS)*.

The RMS is designed to assist AEC staff to focus on maintaining public trust in the AEC and the integrity of electoral processes for the purpose of defending Australian democracy. It prescribes an ongoing and sustained effort across the entire agency to uplift internal awareness and capability to maintain a positive and trusted view of the AEC.

The six RMS principles below underpin the AEC's approach to reputation management, assisting the AEC to actively manage and strengthen the agency's trusted reputation.

Figure 4: The six RMS principles



## Our approach to social media

During the 2022 federal election, the AEC became known for the use of humour on social media, as well as our assertive and corrective approach to commentary that undermined the integrity of electoral processes. This approach has since been broadly acknowledged as an exemplar; however, our approach continues to evolve. For the 2023 referendum, our assessment was that humour was no longer appropriate in most cases on social media, as the information environment seemed to be becoming more fraught.

Instead, our broad communications approach during the 2023 referendum was to proactively 'flood the zone' with accurate information. With voters encountering so many pieces of information every day, it was important the AEC positioned itself as the go-to expert and authoritative source of information on Australian federal electoral processes. We must maintain a constant presence and our credibility to enable us to cut through the noise of the busy information environment, to ensure Australians are correctly informed and understand the exceptional standard and high integrity of Australia's electoral processes.

The AEC's innovative blend of proactive and responsive measures to combat mis and disinformation about referendum processes were largely effective. However, electoral mis and disinformation present an ongoing risk to perceived and actual electoral integrity.

Of particular concern was how narratives online could translate into physical security risks for AEC staff. During the 2023 referendum, individuals promoting conspiracy theories and misinformation engaged in disruptive and, at times, threatening behaviour, filming and harassing AEC staff at polling places and count centres and attempting to identify some staff members online. This behaviour is a significant concern for the AEC and will continue to be proactively addressed.



## Engagement with online media platforms

Since 2018, the AEC has closely liaised with online media platforms regarding electoral integrity issues, including electoral mis and disinformation.

To promote trust in Australian electoral processes, AEC staff may refer content to online media platforms for review and removal, when it is assessed to have breached the Electoral Act, Referendum Act, Commonwealth Electoral (Authorisation of Voter Communication) Determination 2021 or relevant platform policies.

This engagement has been mostly positive and collaborative. However, platforms are reducing their content moderation, and there seems to be a decreased commitment by some platforms to fighting electoral mis and disinformation. The AEC is continuing to invest in relationships with platforms to navigate these challenges, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to overcome these trends.

# Disinformation Register

In response to the changing information environment, and to help defend the Australian electoral process from the harms of mis and disinformation, the AEC established an online Disinformation Register prior to the 2022 federal election. That register, now a permanent feature of each federal electoral event, lists prominent pieces of disinformation regarding the electoral process, alongside the correct, fact-based information.

The AEC is not the arbiter of truth regarding issue or political communication and does not seek to censor debate in any way. However, when it comes to the electoral process, the AEC has a responsibility to ensure voters have access to factual information, so they can fully participate in the Australian democratic process.

By listing and correcting electoral mis and disinformation, the AEC is assisting to both de-bunk and pre-bunk false narratives about the electoral process, encouraging voters to stop, consider and assess the reliability of the information they are consuming.

## Stop and Consider Campaign

**REFERENDUM 2023**

**CHECK THE SOURCE**  
this upcoming referendum

# Stop and consider

During the referendum you may come across information that isn't supported by evidence, is missing context or is even deliberately misleading. To be well informed, be a critical thinker when consuming information and think about whether the information is accurate and truthful.

**Disinformation tactics**  
Disinformation is knowingly false information designed to deliberately mislead and influence public opinion, and disinformation doesn't spread on its own. People trying to disguise disinformation can use some of the following tactics to intentionally try and mislead you.

**Just asking questions**  
People may intentionally ask questions to cast doubt on something without providing any evidence. Although most questions asked are legitimate, be on the lookout for questions asked in bad faith or about very unlikely situations. Stop and consider why the question is being asked.

**Emotional language**  
Strong language that evokes negative emotions like anger or fear can make it easier for content to go viral. If you see something that makes you feel a strong emotional response, stop and consider why.

**Cherry-picking**  
Cherry-picking occurs when information is provided without context, such as screenshots or statistics without reference to their original source.

**Your role as a voter**  
Referendum laws do not regulate truth in communication or advertising. Take the time to consider if the information is:

**Reliable**  
Is it from a reliable or recognisable source? Do you know the source of the information? Has it come from an accredited media outlet or official social media account? If you're not sure, check if the account is newly created, or if it has other posts.

**Current**  
When was it published? Just because a post/article was shared today does not mean it is current. Always check the original source and publication date. Old post/articles that may no longer be accurate can be shared to make them appear like new information.

**The AEC's role**  
The AEC is the independent agency tasked with running the referendum. The AEC's role is to:

**Provide reliable information on the referendum process**  
The AEC will provide easy access to information regarding how to enrol or vote through our advertising campaign, website, contact centre and social media accounts. If there is any incorrect information about these processes, the AEC will act to correct the record. Outside these processes – the AEC does not have any role in checking the truth of referendum communication.

**Investigate the authorisation of referendum communications**  
Certain referendum communications are required to be authorised to help you to know the source of that information.

**Yes and No campaign material**  
Although the AEC is responsible for issuing the referendum pamphlet, which will contain information from the official Yes and No campaigns, the AEC does not have a role in regulating the truth in these communications.

aec.gov.au 13 23 26

Authorised by the Electoral Commissioner, Canberra

To combat mis and disinformation, prior to and during every federal electoral event since 2019, the AEC has run a 'Stop and Consider' campaign, encouraging voters to think critically about sources of electoral information, to avoid being deceived or misled by mis and disinformation, and supporting public understanding of electoral processes.

The AEC delivers some of the largest education campaigns across the Australian government, regularly sharing and promoting information about how eligible Australians can enrol to vote, and how to cast a formal vote in an election or referendum. The Stop and Campaign has been remarkably successful in reaching large numbers of Australians, with research indicating about 20 per cent of the community recognising the campaign and a significant proportion of those individuals modifying their behaviours as a result.

## Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce

The Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce (EIAT) and its Board are constituted by relevant agencies across the federal government, working together to provide information and advice to the Electoral Commissioner on matters that may compromise the real or perceived integrity of federal electoral events, including referendums.

Potential threats to electoral integrity can arise in the form of cyber or physical security incidents, mis or disinformation campaigns, and foreign interference in electoral processes. Public trust in the integrity of an electoral event can be undermined by the realisation or perceived realisation of such threats.

The EIAT ensures information about these threats is efficiently referred to the relevant agencies, facilitates cooperation and coordination between these agencies, and enables them to work together to take any appropriate action.

The EIAT is not involved in the delivery of electoral events and does not have any role in other elements of electoral integrity such as electoral processes, policies, procedures or administrative or regulatory decisions.

**See:** [Chapter 6 - Regulation and security](#) for more information on the EIAT

## Defending Democracy Unit

To manage the AEC's relationships with online media platforms, contribute to reputation management strategies, and oversee electoral integrity and counter-interference initiatives, the Defending Democracy Unit was established in 2022. The Defending Democracy Unit also provides secretariat services for the EIAT, facilitating interagency engagement for electoral integrity, and maintaining trust in the integrity of Australian electoral processes.

The AEC is proud of the manner in which the complex environment was navigated to ensure the high integrity of the 2023 referendum.

# 2

## Legislation

Commonwealth of Australia

*Writ for a Referendum*

To **THOMAS JOSEPH ROGERS**, Electoral Commissioner.

**I command you** to cause a proposed law entitled Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 to be submitted, according to law, in each State and in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, to the electors who are qualified to vote at referendums.

I appoint the following dates:

1. For the close of the Rolls: the eighteenth day of September 2023.
2. For taking the votes of the electors: the fourteenth day of October 2023.
3. For the return of the writ: on or before the twentieth day of December 2023.

His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley  
AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the  
Commonwealth of Australia at Canberra the eleventh  
day of our Lord Two thousand

ENTERED ON RECORD BY ME IN REGISTER OF PATENTS, NCI  
*Thomas Joseph Rogers*

## Legislation

The AEC maintains impartial electoral systems and processes for elections, referendums, plebiscites, and by-elections in accordance with two key pieces of legislation: the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act) and the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* (the Referendum Act).

This legislation guides our planning and delivery of electoral events. The amendments to the Referendum Act (2023), the passing of the Constitution Alteration Bill (which set out the proposed alteration to the Constitution to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice), and the issue of writ were all significant legislative moments for the AEC, directly informing how we delivered the 2023 referendum.

# Legislation to conduct the referendum

## *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Amendment Act 2023*

The *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* (Referendum Act) sets the legislative framework for conducting a referendum. On 27 March 2023, the Referendum Act was amended by the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Amendment Act 2023* (Amendment Act).

The Amendment Act made amendments to align the referendum machinery provisions with requirements in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) to enable the referendum voting process and experience to be similar to that of a federal election. The Amendment Act also enhanced the integrity and transparency measures in the Referendum Act by aligning the authorisation requirements with the Electoral Act and establishing a referendum financial disclosure scheme.

The Amendment Act:

- enabled the use of a similar envelope design for postal voting as was used at the federal election
- allowed for pre-poll ordinary votes to be sorted from 4pm on voting day
- allowed for the extraction of postal votes from the Monday before voting day
- applied the designated elector framework to referendums
- removed the requirement for authorisation statements to have printer details
- established a financial disclosure scheme and foreign donation restrictions for referendum campaigning
- provided that for a standalone referendum, the days determined for mobile polling can be any of the 19 days before voting day
- made other minor amendments to align the Referendum Act with the Electoral Act.

Prior to the passage of the Amendment Act, the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022 (Amendment Bill) was referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM). JSCEM received over 70 submissions and held two public hearings.

JSCEM's [Advisory report on the Referendum \(Machinery Provisions\) Amendment Bill 2022](#) was tabled on 13 February 2023, recommending the Amendment Bill be passed subject to recommendations strengthening enfranchisement and participation. A dissenting report by Coalition members and Senators opposed the removal of the Yes/No pamphlet, recommended the creation of official campaign entities, and argued for equal funding of the Yes and No campaigns. Ultimately the bill was amended to retain the requirement in the Referendum Act for the Yes/No pamphlet.

**See:** [Chapter 4 - Yes/No pamphlet](#)

# Legislation for the proposed constitutional changes

The *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023* (Constitution Alteration Bill) to add the following new chapter to the Constitution was introduced into the House of Representatives on 30 March 2023:

## Chapter IX — Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

### 129 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

- (i) there shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;
- (ii) the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- (iii) the Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.

The Constitution Alteration Bill was passed by the House of Representatives on 31 May 2023 and by the Senate on 19 June 2023.

To become law, section 128 of the Constitution then required:

- not less than two nor more than six months after the Constitution Alteration Bill passage through both Houses the proposed law shall be submitted in each State and Territory to the electors qualified to vote for the election of members of the House of Representatives, and
- a double majority must be obtained at any referendum, being:
  - in a majority of states a majority of the electors voting to approve the proposed law, and
  - a majority of all electors also voting to approve the proposed law.

A referendum could only be held between 19 September 2023 and 19 December 2023.

## Issue of the writ

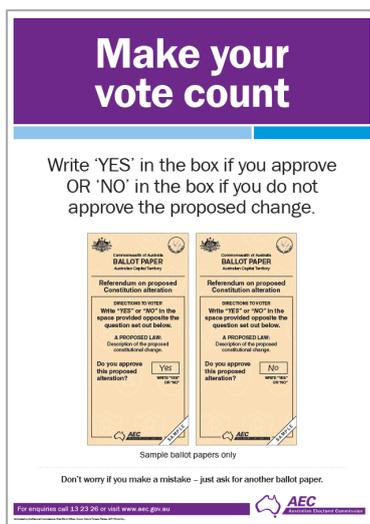
On 30 August 2023, the Prime Minister announced that the referendum would be held on 14 October 2023. On 11 September 2023, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia issued the Electoral Commissioner with the writ instructing him to conduct the referendum. The writ appointed the key dates for the event, being the close of rolls, voting day and the last day for the return of the writ.

**See:** [Referendum timeline](#)

# Legal issues

## Formality

Very high rates of formal voting in previous federal referendums suggested the vast majority of Australian voters would follow the voting instructions on the ballot paper – to write ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in full, in English. Instructions for casting a formal vote were part of the AEC’s advertising campaign, on the AEC website, in the pamphlet delivered to all Australian households, an instruction provided by polling officials when people were issued with their ballot paper, on posters in polling places, included in community education sessions (delivered in 42 languages), in flipbooks available at the polling places in 34 languages, and written on the ballot paper itself in two separate locations.



As for federal elections, the Referendum Act includes ‘savings provisions’ – that is, the ability to count a vote where the instructions have not been followed but the voter’s intention is clear. Legal advice from the Australian Government Solicitor regarding the application of savings provisions to ‘ticks’ and ‘crosses’ has been provided on multiple occasions over the last three decades. It has been consistently advised that a tick can be counted as a formal vote as the voter’s intent (approval) is clear, whereas a cross cannot be counted as it can denote either approval or disapproval.

The AEC’s application of saving provisions was challenged in the Federal Court in the lead up to the 2023 referendum. On 20 September 2023, in the case of *Babet v Electoral Commissioner* [2023] FCA 1126, Justice Rares dismissed a challenge and endorsed the longstanding legal position that a cross does not manifest a clear intention to vote ‘no’, making it an informal vote. Furthermore, a tick manifests a clear intention to vote ‘yes’, and therefore constitutes a formal vote. On 9 October 2023, the Full Federal Court dismissed an appeal by Senator Babet in *Babet v Electoral Commissioner* [2023] FCAFC 164, upholding the decision of Justice Rares.

The AEC followed the law to ensure that every vote was correctly counted according to the voter’s intention. The final results from the 2023 referendum showed that 155,545 informal votes were cast. The informality rate was 0.98 per cent. Of those, 8,140 were marked with a cross, which is 0.05 per cent of all votes cast.

**See:** [Chapter 10 – Processing the results](#) for more information on formality.

3

# Referendum Readiness



## Referendum readiness

The AEC engages in a variety of readiness activities to track and assess the level of readiness required to deliver an electoral event that is robust, independent, and impartial. Working to our election readiness framework, the AEC can accurately forecast critical readiness milestones and assess its progress against them.

This process plays a critical part in ensuring electoral events are delivered on time, to a high standard, and produce results that the Australian public has trust and confidence in. While usually a three-year timeframe, the AEC adapted its election readiness framework to prepare and mobilise for the 2023 referendum over a 15-month period, following the 2022 federal election.

# Preparing and planning for the referendum

The AEC uses an election readiness framework to prepare for event delivery. The framework ensures the way we plan and run events always evolves to meet:

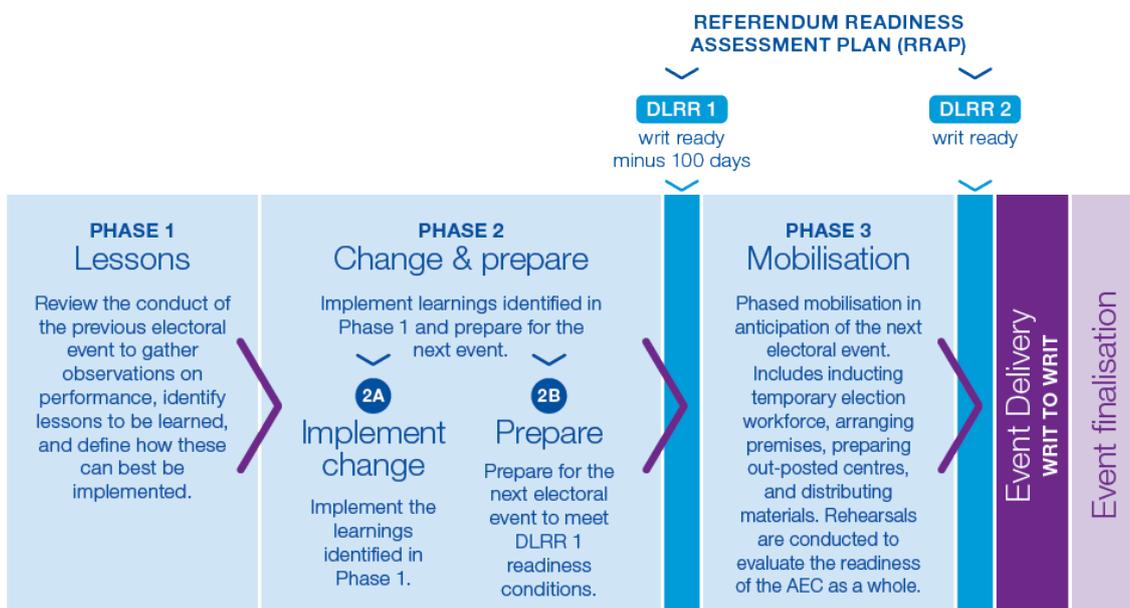
1. increasing public and stakeholder expectations
2. the challenges of a dynamic operating environment
3. the legislative requirements that govern how we deliver elections and referendums.

We have been using this framework since the 2016 federal election to plan, monitor, assess risk and assure compliance of the core preparation activities. We set out the activities that will contribute to a directed level of readiness for the event in the Election/Referendum Ready Road Map and we assure our performance against these targets through our Election/Referendum Readiness Assessment Plan. The readiness road map informs a series of cascading operational delivery plans by business areas across all areas of the AEC, with national plans informing state level and divisional office level plans. Finally, just prior to delivery, rehearsals are run to ensure we have put lessons learnt from previous electoral events in place.

The Electoral Commissioner provides direction on the level of readiness required at certain milestones. For the 2023 referendum, these milestones were based on the likelihood of the referendum being announced at a given point in time. The anticipated date of the writ being issued is the foundation for all readiness planning. The Directed Levels of Referendum Readiness (DLRR) milestone dates are centred around being 'writ ready' and guide the timing of preparation activities on the readiness road map.

Referendum Readiness Road Map activities were undertaken and assured through the Referendum Readiness Assessment Plan (RRAP), in parallel to planning and delivering two by-elections and commencing the election readiness process for the next federal election due in 2024/2025. This period of concurrent planning for several electoral events represented one of the busiest planning periods in the AEC's history. Our assurance processes and governance forums across the agency played a critical part in ensuring our ability to concurrently plan and deliver several events over a short period of time.

**Figure 5: The Referendum Readiness Road Map**



# Assurance and governance

## Assurance

The RRAP provided a risk identification and mitigation approach to the analysis, coordination and assessment of tasks that lead to the AEC being referendum ready. The RRAP described specific assessment activities to be conducted to determine the level of AEC referendum readiness. This included a series of assurance interviews, which were conducted by the National Election Manager (NEM) with the operations team of each state and territory. The aim of these interviews was to assess whether required outcomes and activities related to the RRRM were completed, and the quality of completion in terms of referendum readiness. These assessments occurred between January and August 2023.

**Table 2: Referendum readiness assessment activities**

<b>What activities were assessed?</b>	<b>What assurance was provided?</b>
Temporary Election Workforce (TEW)	All TEW recruitment systems, processes and resources were in place to allow for successful recruitment of the required numbers of TEW.
Staff are match fit	All staff were trained and rested ahead of the event.
Business continuity and incident management plans	All AEC plans were in place to allow continued performance of critical event functions through and after a disruption.
Activities supporting First Nations people's participation	Indigenous community engagement arrangements were finalised, enrolment numbers increased and specific TEW positions identified to support Indigenous communities to vote.
Election ICT systems	Critical ICT systems met the needs of the business for the referendum. All systems were fit for purpose and appropriately tested.
Rehearsals	Rehearsals were successfully conducted on key electoral processes.
Communication and public relations plans	All AEC communication and public relations plans were finalised and in place.
Public contact	Complaints Management and Contact Centre were in place and event ready.
Equity of access to voter services	Services capability had been established to allow greater accessibility to voters.
Referendum and ballot materials	All contracts and logistics were in place to ensure sufficient materials were in polling places in a timely manner.
Premises	All polling place premises were identified and able to be engaged on issue of writ.
Financial management	Event forecasting was finalised and systems were in place to accurately reflect event costs.
Delivery plans	State and divisional delivery plans were fit for purpose, finalised, and approved.

## Governance

Internal AEC governance committees provided oversight and management of 2023 referendum preparation and delivery activities, with a focus on key risks to ensure changes in the referendum operating environment were identified and systems of controls remained effective. The following committees provided governance and assurance over 2023 referendum preparation, delivery, and review:

- **Executive Leadership Team (ELT)**: the senior executive team that assists the Electoral Commissioner to deliver strategic leadership and operational management of the AEC.
- **National Operations and Readiness (NOR) Committee/Director Operations and Readiness (DOR) group**:
  - NOR – a senior executive-level governance committee that convened every six weeks prior to the announcement of referendum voting day to oversee and monitor the agency’s operations with a particular focus on preparation and readiness of referendum services, in addition to monitoring preparations for the next federal election and by-elections.
  - DOR – a director-level governance committee that convened every three weeks prior to the announcement of referendum voting day in support of NOR to monitor readiness for the 2023 referendum through exception reporting and advice to NOR.
- **Referendum Coordination Committee (RCC)**: chaired by the Deputy Electoral Commissioner, this governance committee met weekly to provide strategic oversight, visibility and coordination of referendum related policy and operational work across relevant functions of the AEC. The RCC operated in conjunction with the NOR Committee to support internal planning for the delivery of the 2023 referendum.
- **National Election Delivery Committee (NEDC)/DOR Delivery Scrum (DDS)**:
  - NEDC – a senior executive-level governance committee that met daily during the writ-to-writ period to drive, coordinate, and monitor the conduct of the 2023 referendum across the country.
  - DDS – a director-level governance committee that met daily during the writ-to-writ period in support of the NEDC to monitor referendum activities through the referendum delivery tracker and dashboards. The DDS reported and escalated issues when required to NEDC.

## Whole-of-government engagement

Up until the passage of the Constitution Alteration Bill, the AEC participated in a weekly Referendum Interdepartmental Committee (IDC), chaired by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), and attended by other relevant Commonwealth agencies and departments.

The IDC discussed matters impacting multiple departments, including the passage of the Amendment Act and the timing of the Constitution Alteration Bill. The purpose of the AEC’s attendance at IDC meetings was to provide operational input relevant to the delivery of a referendum. The AEC refrained from attending or participating in discussions relating to government policy on the referendum more broadly.

The AEC also presented to the First Nations Referendum Engagement Group on three occasions in the lead-up to the 2023 referendum. Coordinated by the NIAA, this group was made up of

representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia and was formed to provide advice to government on matters relating to the 2023 referendum. The AEC presented to the group on topics including:

- Indigenous enrolment and engagement
- the referendum public information campaign
- community engagement and partnerships
- expanded remote voter services.

# Engagement and participation

## Enrol to vote in elections and referendums

### Who needs to enrol

**All Australian citizens aged 18 and over.**

Remember to update your details if you have changed your name or address. If you are already enrolled to vote in elections, you don't need to enrol again for referendums.

### How to enrol

**Step 1** Have one of these forms of identity:



Driver's Licence



Medicare card



Australian passport



Australian Citizenship certificate



Someone enrolled who knows who you are

**Step 2** Visit [aec.gov.au](http://aec.gov.au) to enrol or update your details online, or call 13 23 26 to request a paper enrolment form.

**Enrol today** to have your say



## Engagement and participation

Ensuring that all eligible citizens are aware of their democratic rights and responsibilities is one of the key elements of a high integrity electoral system. To that end, one of the ways the AEC ensures Australians can participate in electoral events is through education and public awareness programs. These programs are fundamental to increasing voter engagement and participation.

For the 2023 referendum, the AEC engaged in a range of education activities across the country, with a particular focus on people who needed additional support to be able to participate. This contributed to a very high level of engagement and participation in the 2023 referendum, including the highest enrolment rate in the history of federal electoral events in Australia, a record high Indigenous enrolment rate, and a record high youth enrolment rate.

Increased enrolment needs to translate into strong turnout and the casting of formal votes. Accordingly, with 47 per cent of enrolled voters having never participated in a referendum before, our education and communication campaign was designed to be comprehensive, including advertising, media partnerships, social media, and extensive engagement online. We engaged deeply with community leaders and local organisations to deliver targeted voter education, including over 380 community face to face and online education sessions in 42 languages.

Translated information was available in 34 international languages, 27 First Nations languages and Auslan. We also provided tailored information to Australian voters overseas.

# Enrolment

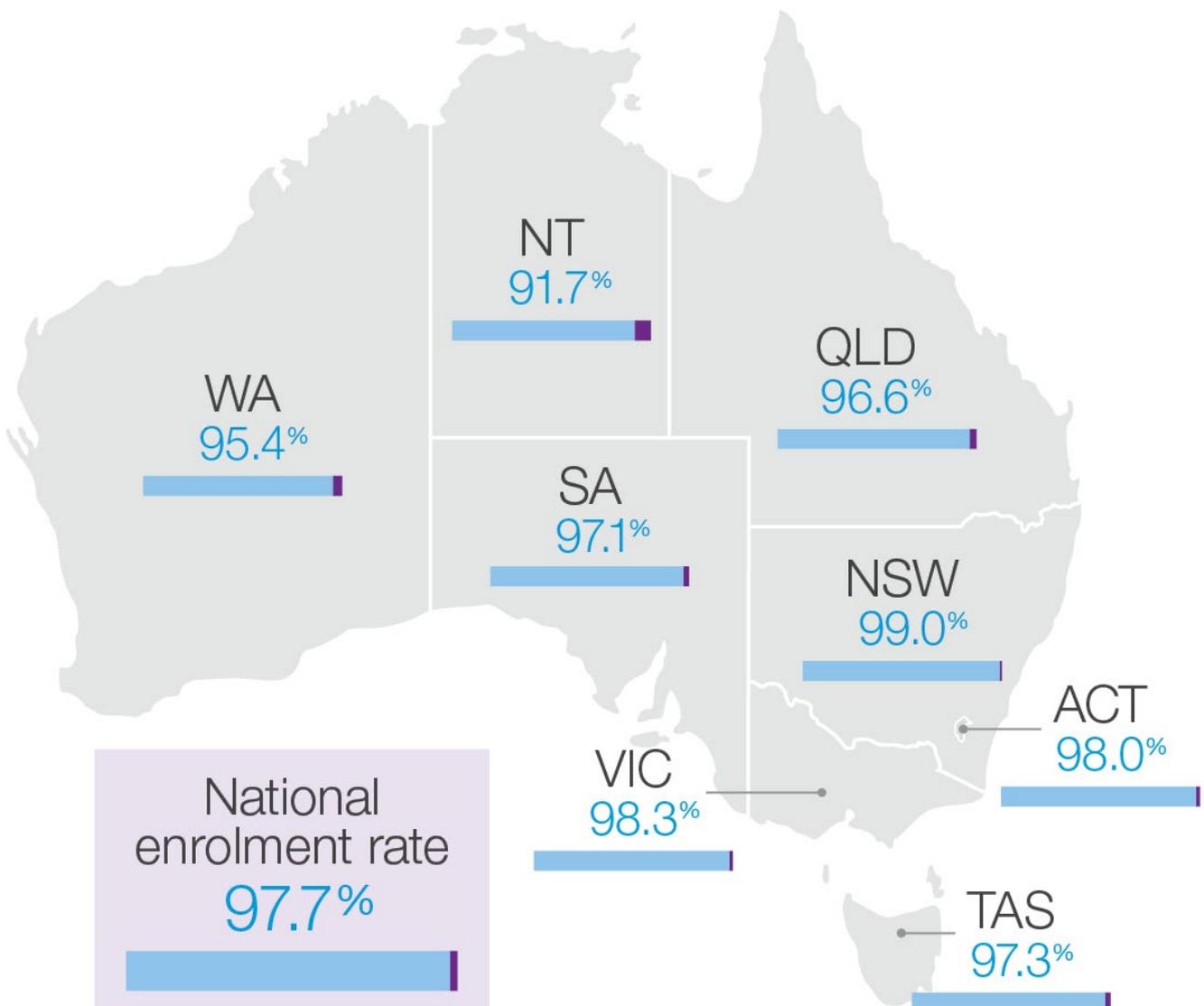
## Enrolment stimulation

### State of the roll

The federal electoral roll for the 2023 referendum provided the best base for democratic participation of any federal electoral event in Australia's history. A record 17,676,347 electors were enrolled at the close of rolls on Monday 18 September 2023, an increase of 2.6 per cent since the close of rolls for the 2022 federal election.

With an estimated eligible population of 18.1 million, this represented an enrolment rate for the referendum of 97.7 per cent, an increase of 0.9 percentage points compared with the 2022 federal election. The enrolment rate exceeded the AEC's target of 95 per cent in all states and territories except the Northern Territory, noting there was still a marked increase in the Northern Territory enrolment rate, up from 85.6 per cent at the 2022 federal election to 91.7 per cent for the 2023 referendum.

Figure 6: Enrolment rates by state and territory



The youth enrolment rate (ages 18 to 24) for the 2023 referendum was 91.4 per cent, compared to 88.1 per cent at the 2022 federal election, representing an increase of 3.3 percentage points.

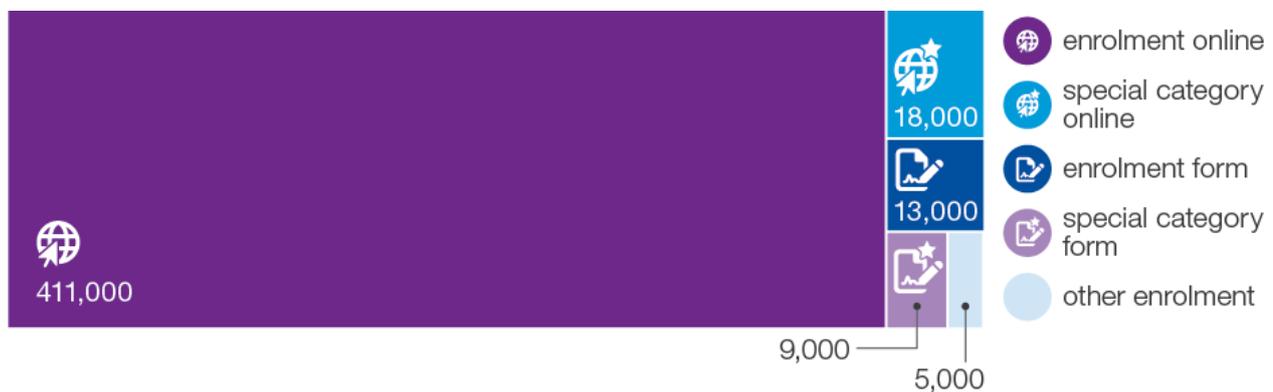
An estimated 413,000 eligible people were not enrolled for the 2023 referendum.

## Close of rolls

Australians have until 8pm on the seventh day after the writ is issued to request to enrol or update their details. Between announcement of the 2023 referendum date on 30 August 2023 and the close of rolls on 18 September 2023, the AEC processed around 455,000 enrolment transactions, including 79,000 roll additions and 376,000 updates.

The AEC provided enrolment services online, with paper enrolment forms also made available from AEC offices, partner government agencies and selected Australia Post outlets in regional and remote areas. Completed paper applications could be uploaded to the AEC website, lodged by email, mail and in person. However, the majority of enrolment applications received during the close of rolls period were submitted online.

Figure 7: Enrolment transactions by channel



'Special category' refers to enrolment options for people with specific needs or circumstances affecting their enrolment, such as general postal voters, silent electors and electors living overseas.

Table 3: Comparison of enrolment between the 1999 and 2023 referendums

Comparison	1999 referendum	2023 referendum	Comments
Close of rolls enrolment	12,361,694	17,676,347	↑ 5,314,653 (43% increase)
Enrolment rate	95% (estimate*)	97.7%	* Current methodology not used in 1999
Years since previous referendum	11	24	
Turned 18 since previous referendum	2.4 million (20% of roll)	6.7 million (38% of roll)	
Others new to the roll since previous referendum	Data not available	1.7 million (9% of roll)	Many of whom are new Australian citizens

## Roll integrity

The AEC has an integrated program of rolling activities to ensure the integrity of the electoral roll is maintained at all times throughout the electoral cycle. This acknowledges that the roll is dynamic by nature.

The roll is maintained by the AEC in line with legislative requirements. It is regularly updated using trusted data from various government agencies including Services Australia, the Australian Taxation Office, and state and territory drivers' licence authorities. Additionally, the AEC uses data matching and verification processes to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the electoral roll. Indicators of roll integrity reported by the AEC include enrolment rate, youth enrolment rate and the Annual Roll Integrity Review.

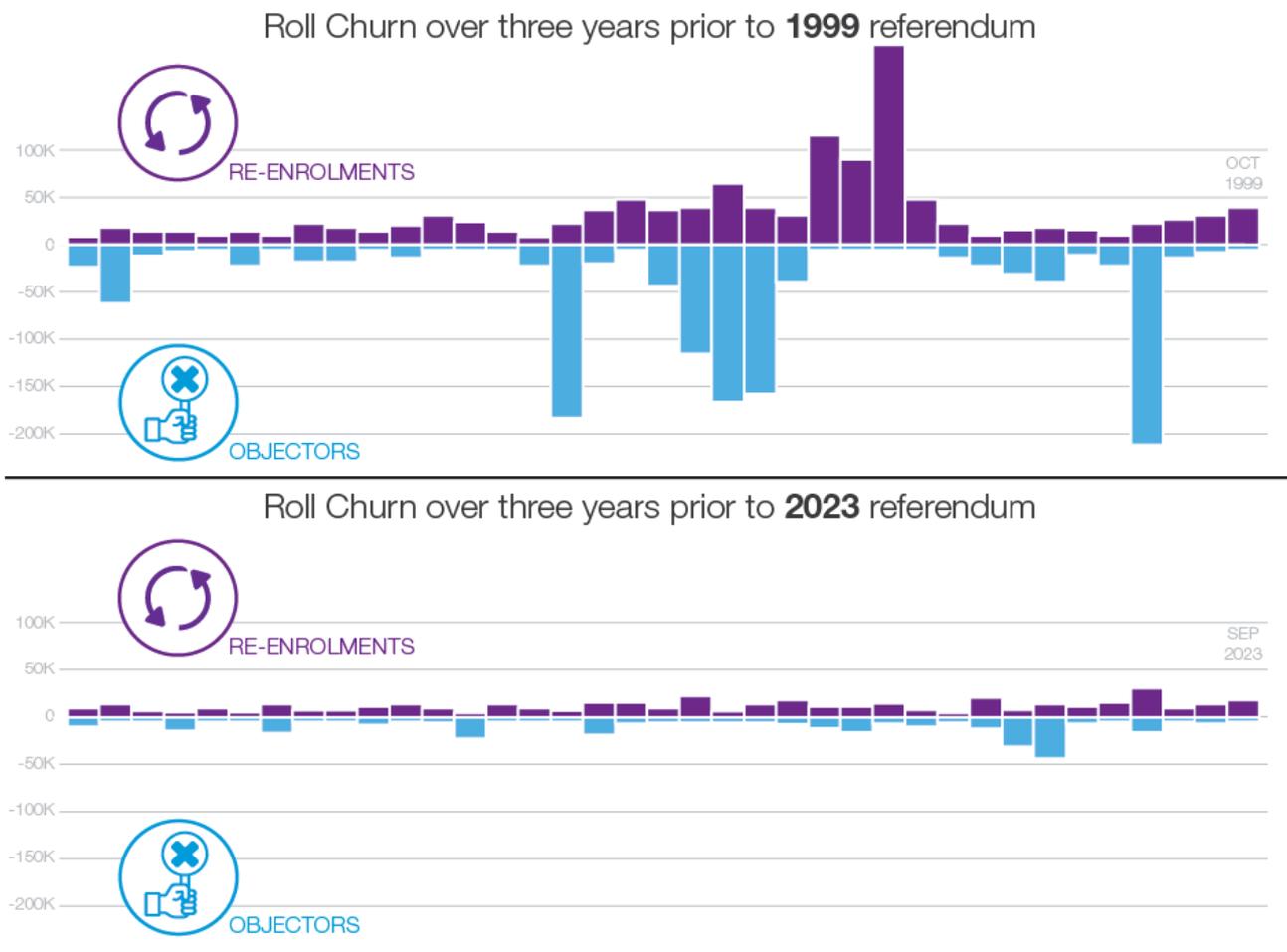
The roll is available for public inspection and, in accordance with relevant legislation, is provided to eligible organisations and individuals, providing the Australian community with high levels of confidence in its integrity and accuracy. This is also verified through activities undertaken by the AEC and external entities such as the Australian National Audit Office and the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

Acting as a prompt for electors to enrol or update their details, the roll is generally at its most accurate for a federal event.

The AEC's Federal Direct Enrolment and Update (FDEU) program is used to assist Australians to meet their enrolment obligations by applying trusted third-party information directly, without the need for that person to initiate an enrolment application. The program enables the AEC to maintain a more accurate and complete electoral roll at all times. Prior to the introduction of FDEU, if the AEC had information that a person had moved, the only step available was to commence objection action. This created a large volume of 'churn', with high numbers of people being removed from the roll and re-enrolling.

In the three years prior to the close of rolls for the 1999 referendum, the AEC removed more than 1 million people from the roll due to non-residence at their enrolled address. Over the same period, around 784,000 people re-enrolled. In contrast, in the three years prior to the 2023 referendum, the AEC removed around 210,000 people from the roll due to non-residence at their enrolled address and around 210,000 people were re-enrolled.

Figure 8: Roll removals and re-enrolments – 1999 and 2023 referendum comparison



As an additional roll integrity and enfranchisement measure, an elector unable to be found on the certified list when they attend a polling place to vote must complete a declaration envelope to cast their vote. The voter's name and address details are captured on the envelope before the ballot paper is inserted. These details are compared to the electoral roll during preliminary scrutiny, which occurs before the ballot is removed and counted.

This process ensures that the elector can cast their vote, but only eligible votes are counted. If, during preliminary scrutiny, the AEC finds that a voter was incorrectly removed from the address they have claimed entitlement for, the enrolment will be reinstated, and the ballot paper counted.

After the 1999 referendum more than 37,000 people were reinstated during preliminary scrutiny. In comparison, after the 2023 referendum there were around 3,700 reinstatements during preliminary scrutiny. This reduction is consistent with federal elections since the commencement of FDEU, and points to the high levels of accuracy and currency in the electoral roll now.

**Table 4: Referendum enrolment activity – 1999 and 2023**

Comparison	1999 referendum	2023 referendum
Non-residence objections in previous 3 years	1,014,000	210,000
Re-enrolments in previous 3 years	784,000	210,000
Close of Rolls enrolment	12,361,694	17,676,347
Notebook* roll additions	450	760
Notebook roll deletions	-7,394	-9,002
Reinstatements during preliminary scrutiny	37,290 (0.3% of roll)	3,679 (0.02% of roll)
Final enrolment	12,392,040	17,671,784

\* A notebook roll is a list of corrections that have been made to the certified list after the close of rolls. Although the Electoral Act allows for changes to the roll at any time, the scannable certified list cannot be amended after the close of rolls. Common corrections that may be made to the notebook roll include additions and omissions of an elector from the certified list and other data entry errors at the point of enrolment or update. Notebook roll additions include new citizens after close of rolls and notebook deletions include deaths between close of rolls and voting day.

## Enrolment activities and trials

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voters

Indigenous enrolment rate estimates have been published by the AEC since June 2017. Between June 2017 and June 2022, the national Indigenous enrolment rate estimate increased by 7 percentage points from 74.7 per cent to 81.7 per cent.

The AEC is committed to the full electoral participation of all eligible Australians and is investing in partnerships and activities to promote electoral engagement with First Nations Australians as part of this work.

In 2021–22 and prior to the 2022 federal election, the AEC received \$9.4 million over four years to enhance First Nations electoral engagement activities. The October 2022-23 Budget provided a further \$16.1 million to the AEC over two years to increase First Nations enrolment and participation in future electoral events. The funding and associated activities formed the basis of the AEC's *Enhancing Indigenous Electoral Participation* project.

Despite the dramatic and positive influence of the Federal Direct Enrolment and Update (FDEU) on lifting overall enrolment rates, the AEC was aware the program, initially, had less impact in improving enrolment of Australians living in remote areas. In 2022-23, the AEC completed a major project to enhance the effectiveness of FDEU in remote areas, particularly for First Nations people, using new data and trialling revised business rules. This project included the following initiatives:

1. The AEC incorporated new Centrelink data into FDEU using existing business rules, which led to 14,000 First Nations people being added to the electoral roll in September 2022.
2. Work to include First Nations people living in remote communities involved two trials in 60 remote communities across northern Australia (Queensland, Western Australia, and the

Northern Territory). The first trial involved sending FDEU notifications by mail to people who rely on community mailbags for postal services and resulted in the addition of 550 people to the roll in October 2022.

3. The second remote area trial used email (rather than surface mail) to notify people living in the same 60 remote communities and resulted in the addition of a further 800 people to the roll in December 2022.

Considering these trial outcomes, the AEC has amended the national FDEU program to permanently include these business rules. Rollouts began nationally in the first half of 2023 and led to the addition of a further 45,000 First Nations people to the roll in June 2023. This brought the total number of First Nations people added to the roll by FDEU in 2022-23 to approximately 61,000.

Launched in November 2022 as part of the *Enhancing Indigenous Electoral Participation* project, the AEC also ran a campaign to increase the electoral participation of First Nations peoples. Over two phases, the campaign aimed to raise awareness of how to enrol, and the ability to enrol or update details any time.

In addition, as part of the *Enhancing Indigenous Electoral Participation* project, the AEC conducted a referendum trial in six divisions (Lingiari, Solomon, Kennedy, Leichhardt, Grey, and Durack) with a cohort of First Nations electors with known 'alias' names. These alias names were linked to their name on the certified list and loaded into the Electronic Certified List. The AEC hoped through this trial to enable a person to use their enrolled name, or any one of their alias names, and be found on the certified list. They could then be immediately marked off on the certified list at the polling place, and eligible to cast an ordinary vote. Without this capability, voters with alias names are typically not found on the electoral roll and are then required to cast a provisional declaration vote.

Across the six divisions, 40,951 electors were identified as having at least one alias and during the 2023 referendum a total of 5,016 voters were located on the certified list using an alias. Of those 5,016 votes, 61.40 per cent were issued by a remote mobile polling team, 32.34 per cent were issued at pre-poll voting centres, and 6.26 per cent were issued through mobile voting teams (in prisons or nursing homes). This trial was highly successful in improving the voting experience for impacted voters and reducing cost and post-voting day administration for the AEC. We will look to expand this capability for future events.

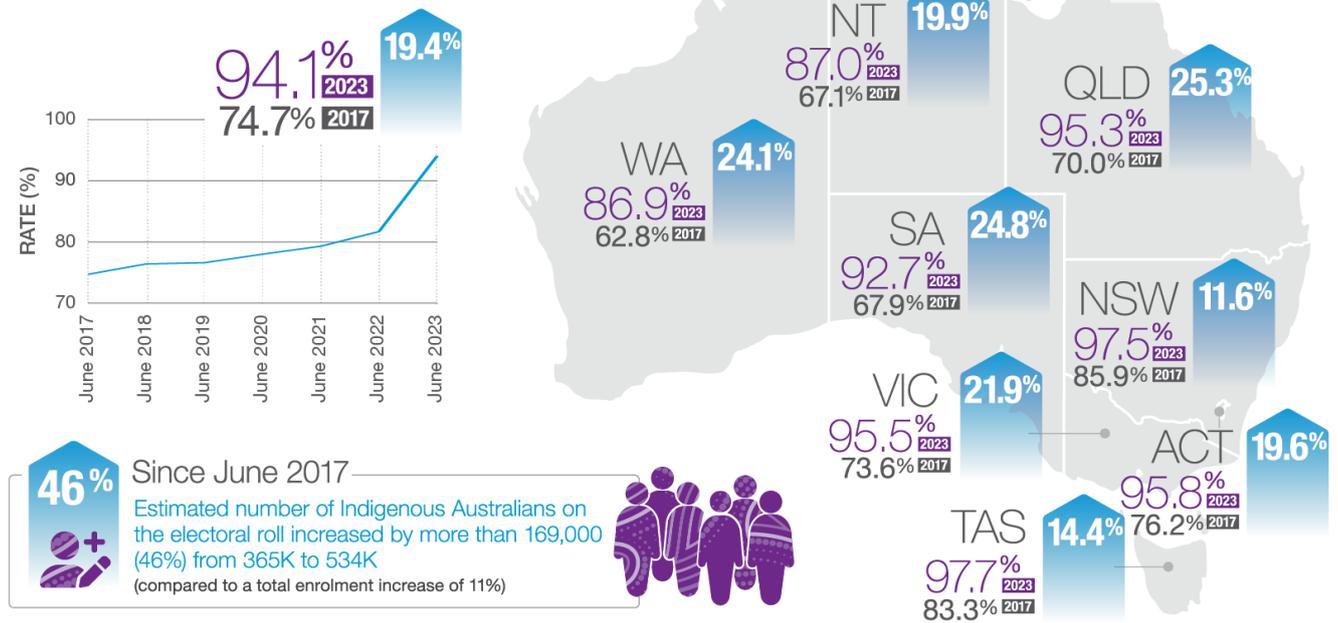
The AEC's Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) undertook targeted engagement work to support electoral participation of First Nations peoples. The IEPP supported First Nations enrolment through establishing local partnerships and working with state and territory agencies to undertake an extensive remote enrolment program in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The team also delivered culturally appropriate information and education sessions.

**See:** [Chapter 4 - Indigenous Electoral Participation Program](#) for more information

As a result of all the above enrolment activities, between June 2022 and June 2023, the national Indigenous enrolment rate increased by a further 12.4 percentage points from 81.7 per cent to 94.1 per cent. The rapid rise represents the largest increase since estimates were first calculated in this manner by the AEC in 2017.

Figure 9: Indigenous enrolment estimates by state and territory as at June 2023

**More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are enrolled to vote than ever before**



**Prisons**

Ahead of the 2023 referendum, the AEC conducted an additional trial to enrol inmates by FDEU. The AEC sent nearly 900 notices to people in 30 prisons in Western Australia, South Australia, and the Northern Territory. The trial enrolment of more than 700 people and around half were matched to trusted government partner records for clients identifying as First Nations people.

The AEC also worked closely with corrective services agencies in each state and territory to ensure people in prison were supported to enrol or update their enrolment details for the 2023 referendum. Guided by the corrective services agency in each jurisdiction, AEC staff provided either the department or individual correctional facilities with information, resources, enrolment forms and support to assist people in prison to enrol. Resources included guides on how to complete enrolment forms and a factsheet on enrolling and voting in prison. The AEC was given approval for staff to attend some prisons to provide in-person enrolment services directly to prisoners.

The AEC sought to conduct in-person enrolments in Victoria and Tasmania where this was geographically possible. Corrections bodies in both states were supportive of this service and assisted to ensure it was delivered prior to close of rolls.

Northern Territory Corrections requested the AEC provide in-person enrolment services. We were able to visit the Alice Springs and Darwin Corrections facilities with the support of our IEPP staff and Community Electoral Participation Officers.

Enrolment services in Queensland and South Australia were managed centrally through these states' departments of corrections with enrolment forms, resources and support provided to all prisons. Both in-person and centrally coordinated enrolment services led to improved accuracy of enrolment information for people in prison.

All these activities resulted in 654 enrolments being processed for people in prison ahead of the 2023 referendum, including 101 new enrolments or re-enrolments and 553 updates to enrolments.

## **Expanded evidence of identity options**

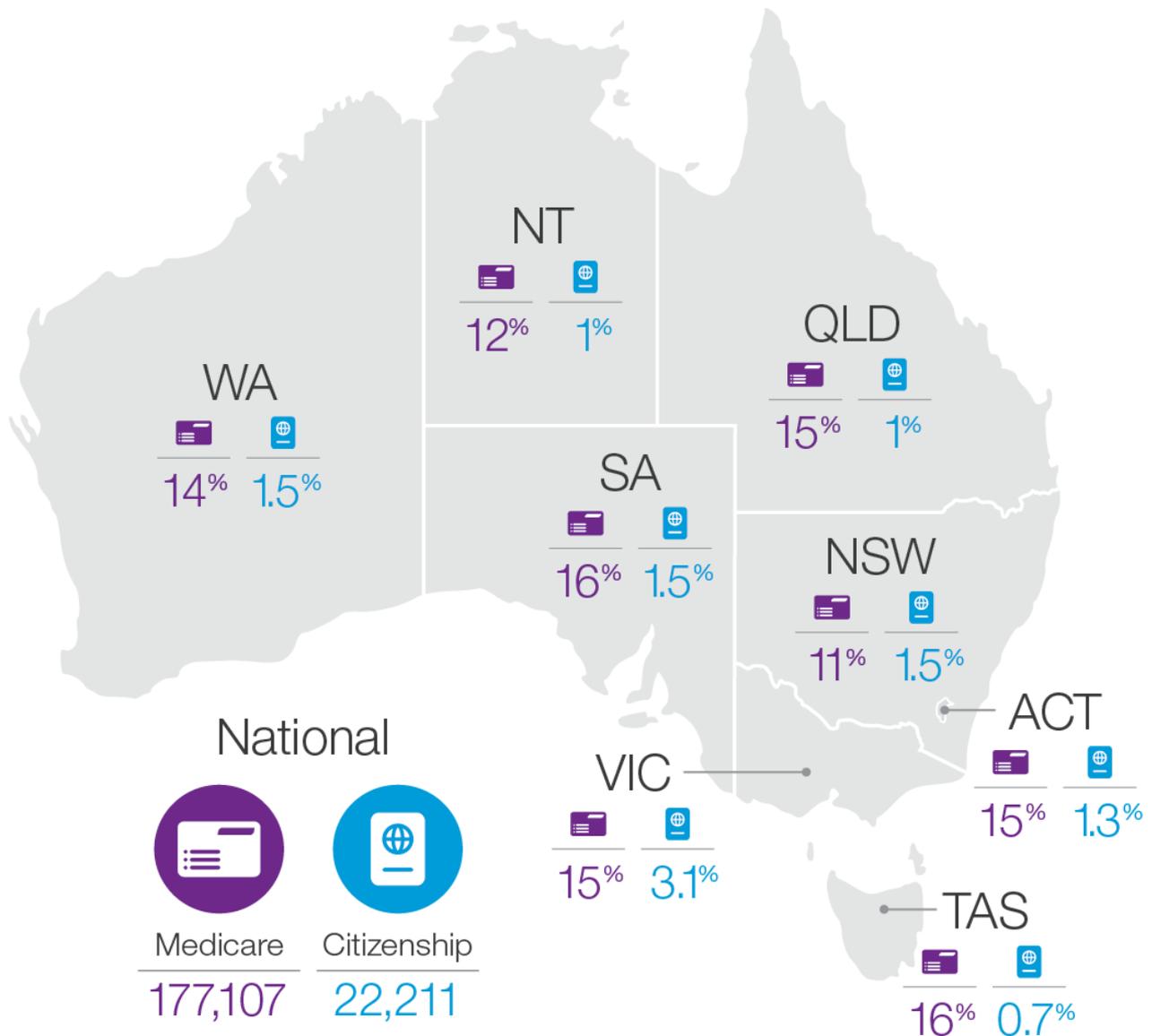
The Electoral Act requires people to provide evidence of identity in their application for enrolment. Until recently, the only acceptable forms of evidence of identity were an Australian driver's licence number, Australian passport number or an enrolled person confirming identity. On 17 February 2023, the Government changed regulations to include a Medicare card number and an Australian citizenship certificate number as acceptable evidence of identity documents for enrolment applications.

This expansion of options allows people to use a wider range of documents, rather than relying on another person to confirm their identity. This will reduce barriers associated with enrolment for people living in remote areas, young and older people, people with disability, and First Nations people who may not have a driver's licence or passport.

When processing claims for enrolment, the AEC operates a rigorous process to ensure only eligible people are added to the roll. The addition of new evidence of identity documents further supports integrity of the roll by increasing the proportion of applications where an evidence of identity document is supplied, providing more confidence for the AEC in the legitimacy of the enrolment application.

On implementation, the AEC saw an immediate uptake of the new forms of evidence of identity, with Medicare or citizenship numbers used in around 15 per cent of enrolment applications approved between 17 February 2023 and the close of rolls for the 2023 referendum.

Figure 10: Enrolment transactions utilising new evidence of identity options 17 February – 23 September 2023



### New citizen enrolment

At close of rolls for the 2023 referendum, Home Affairs’ records held by the AEC indicated that 228,000 people had become new citizens (at age 18 or older) since the close of rolls for the 2022 federal election. When the referendum was announced (on 30 August 2023), more than 190,000 of these (over 83 per cent) were already enrolled. During the close of rolls period, a further 12,000 people enrolled, including almost 4,000 who became citizens on or after the date of announcement. In total, around 89 per cent of new citizens since the 2022 federal election were enrolled for the 2023 referendum, the majority of whom (at least 89 per cent, or 181,100) self-enrolled. This is consistent with previous data indicating high levels of engagement from new citizens.

# Education and communication

## Media partnerships

Knowing the importance of educating voters about why referendums are held, and how to participate in the 2023 referendum, the AEC joined with several media partners to create engaging content to reach people on trusted channels. Partnerships with Southern Cross Austereo (LiSTNR), Snapchat and SBS were facilitated by the whole-of-government media placement agency Universal McCann.

We also expanded our bilingual media offering, arranging interviews with AEC spokespeople in eight community languages: Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, French, Greek, Italian, Macedonian and Urdu.

## Advertising campaign

As it is compulsory for all eligible Australians to enrol and vote in referendums, and it had been almost a quarter of a century since the last referendum, communication was critical to help people exercise their right and fulfil their obligation to vote under federal law. A national, multi-channel, multi-phase advertising campaign was essential to reach all people aged 18 and over and support their participation in the 2023 referendum.

## A significant challenge

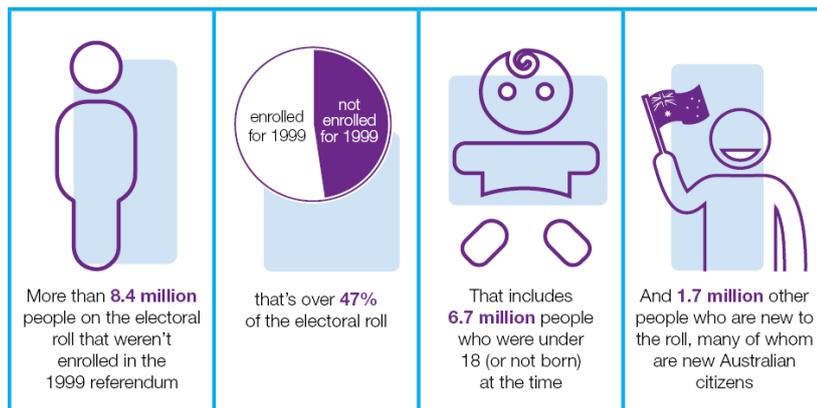
The AEC undertook dedicated research to understand what people knew about referendums, how they felt, what information they needed and the best ways to provide this information. Research showed awareness was low, and there were widespread misconceptions about referendums. For example, some believed voting was not compulsory; you needed to enrol separately; and the result was not binding. People expected the AEC would educate them on:

- the purpose and process of referendums, and dispel myths
- how to participate, including how to correctly complete the ballot paper
- the potential for disinformation about the voting process.

It was important to provide tailored approaches for those who needed more support to participate. This included culturally and linguistically diverse audiences, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability, Australian voters overseas, and those who had not voted in a referendum before (particularly young people).

Finally, the AEC's neutrality and commitment to integrity was paramount. The participation campaign and other communication activities that supported it, was grounded in research and carefully developed with specialist suppliers to be neutral, positive and engaging.

Figure 11: Percentage of enrolled people who had never previously voted in a referendum



## What we did

A small amount of digital and social media advertising ran from April 2023 to July 2023, ahead of the main campaign. These ads encouraged people to visit the AEC website for general information.

The main campaign was complemented by public relations, community outreach, media liaison, social media engagement, website content, development of information products and a community education program. While the complementary activities ran over a longer period, the campaign was delivered over five phases:

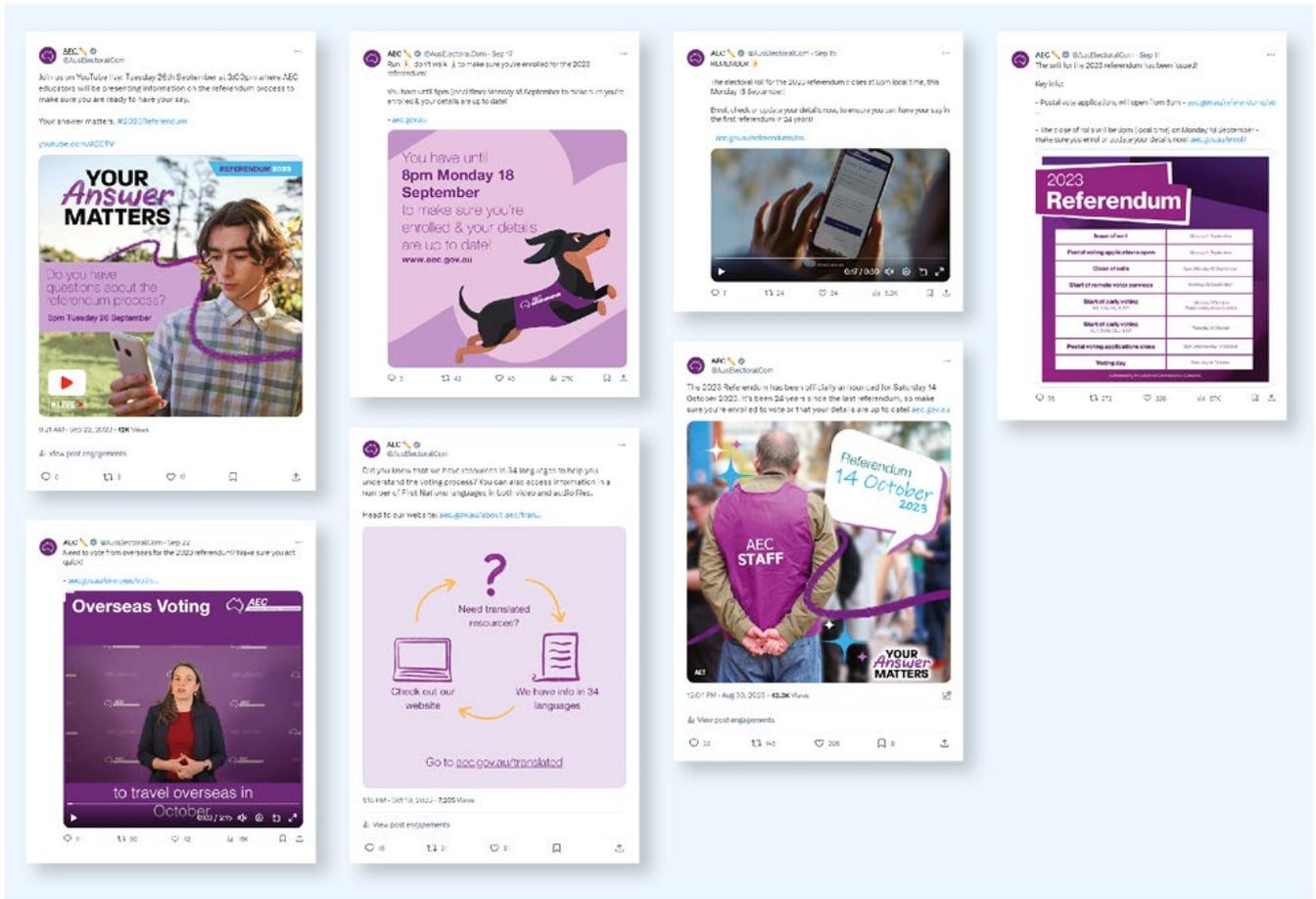
- **Education** – Sunday 20 August 2023 to Saturday 23 September 2023
- **Disinformation** – Sunday 20 August 2023 to Saturday 14 October 2023 (voting day)
- **Enrolment** – Monday 11 September 2023 to Monday 18 September 2023
- **Voter services:**
  - Remote voter services ran from Friday 22 September 2023 to Wednesday 13 October 2023
  - Early voting ran from Sunday 1 October 2023 to Friday 13 October 2023
- **Completing the ballot paper** – Sunday 1 October 2023 to Saturday 14 October (voting day).

Advertising channels included television, radio, online video, cinema, press, outdoor, and digital and social media. This included channels for voters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (such as SBS and ethnic press) and First Nations voters (such as NITV, Indigenous TV and in-language radio).

## Campaign results

Campaign advertising achieved impressive reach:

- over 110 million completed views of video ads
- over 1 billion impressions through video, display, audio, search, and social media (times digital ads were either displayed or viewed)
- 6.5 million clicks to the AEC's website
- 104,000 radio spots, 4,300 outdoor panels and 611 newspaper inserts
- 22.5 million impressions through our Snapchat quiz and 17,000 click-throughs
- 1 million people reached on Samsung TVs through a government-first initiative
- 17 million people reached through Meta.



## Reaching remote voters

Bespoke advertising supported the most comprehensive remote voter services offering the AEC has ever provided. Messages on television, radio, digital and other channels explained the AEC was sending teams across the country to collect votes, and how to find out what locations they would be in and when.



## Your Answer Matters – Referendum 101 podcast series

In a first for the AEC, we worked with Southern Cross Austereo on an informative and shareable podcast series. The 10-minute episodes featured AEC spokespeople on topics like the history of referendums, the double majority, myth busting and what happens on voting day. Episodes were released on the LiSTNR platform and promoted across Southern Cross Austereo's metropolitan and regional radio network. After expecting around 15,000 listens, the episodes were downloaded over 116,000 times.

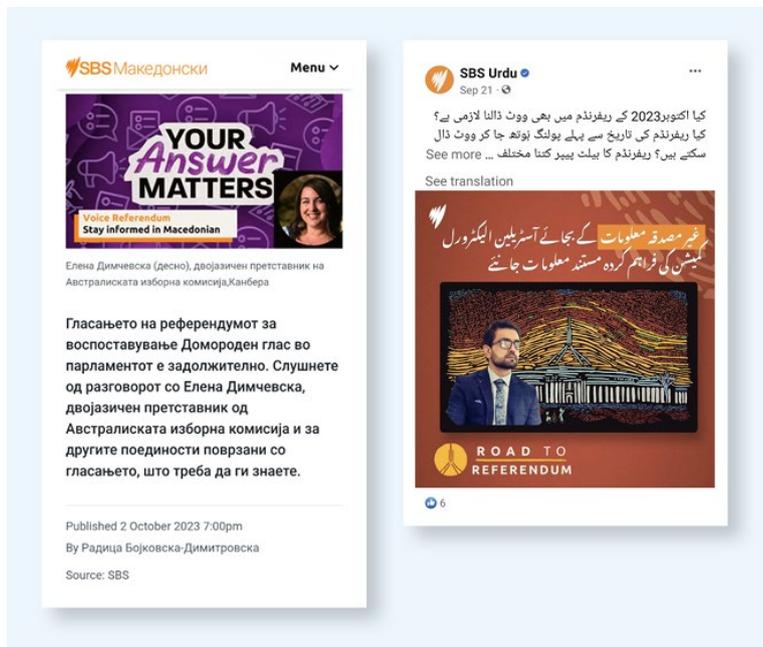
## Information in other languages

### Translated materials

The AEC ensured information needs, cultural sensitivities, and barriers to communication and participation were considered. Translated information about the 2023 referendum included advertising, website information and resources, videos, and telephone translation services.

Information was available in 34 languages for voters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including through ethnic media, stakeholders, and intermediaries. In-language fact sheets covered general detail about referendums and tips to avoid disinformation. A translated 'How to vote' guide was available at every polling place, which explained how to correctly complete the ballot paper.

Information was available in 27 languages for First Nations voters. Information about what happens at the polling place and how to correctly complete a ballot paper was also available on mobile devices as part of remote voter services.



## Stakeholder engagement

The AEC held briefings at key stages with multicultural media outlets, community leaders and stakeholders across the country. Media outlets received translated media releases, a reporting guide, and links to translated resources. Stakeholders were sent comprehensive information kits with links (including to the translated Yes/No pamphlet), social media tiles and information about community education sessions.

## Education activities

A critical part of the AEC's duty to uphold and defend Australia's democratic processes is to ensure the Australian public is educated about how our democracy works. Our comprehensive education program for the 2023 referendum included school-based information through our National Electoral Education Centre, our *Writs to Referendum* exhibition at the Australian Museum of Democracy and an extensive community education program for multicultural and First Nations communities around Australia.

## Community education

The AEC delivered over 380 referendum community education sessions in 42 languages.

This included First Nations community education sessions delivered in urban, regional, and remote areas around the country.

Multicultural community education sessions were delivered in partnership with women's and mother's groups, men's groups, youth organisations, multicultural association meetings, and local governments.

In addition, the AEC met with, and shared education material with, community and faith leaders, who used the material in their networks and communities.

## Community education resources

The AEC developed education kits for use by organisations to educate their community members on the process of a referendum. These were available for download from our website.

Accessible online education was also available in Easy Read and Auslan. Information was available for people experiencing homelessness.

## National Electoral Education Centre and AEC for Schools

All school-based education sessions at the [National Electoral Education Centre](#) included information on the Constitution and referendums. Schools could elect to do a dedicated referendum education session. From 1 January 2023 to 14 October 2023, the National Electoral Education Centre hosted 66,060 visitors.

The [AEC for Schools website](#) provides education resources for schools. These include classroom-based activities on constitutional reform, referendums, and interactive quiz-style games.

## *Writs to Referendums* electoral exhibition

The AEC curated a [Writs to Referendums exhibition](#) at the Museum of Australian Democracy. The exhibition provided visitors with a greater understanding of Australia's electoral system, enabling citizens to play a more active and informed role in electoral matters. Since it launched on 29 November 2022, the exhibition has attracted approximately 49,700 visitors.

## Communication

The AEC communicated regularly throughout 2023 about the referendum and referendum processes. This included not just advertising and community engagement but also a dedicated and informative media, social media, and website presence. The referendum was increasingly topical during the passage of legislation to enable the referendum to occur and leading up to the date being formally announced. The greatest concentration of activity occurred during the writ-to-writ period.

While the AEC is not the arbiter of truth regarding a referendum topic or how people should vote, we are the experts regarding the conduct of the referendum, and we used our communication channels to provide objective facts about those processes. This is becoming increasingly important, particularly with the increase in mis and disinformation, which has the potential to undermine public trust in electoral processes and results, impact the trust in broader Australian democracy, and impact democratic legitimacy, including the peaceful transition of power.

## Website



The AEC created and launched a dedicated 2023 referendum website prior to the issue of the writ and promoted the information to Australian voters regularly since its launch. This website included information about enrolment, accessing the vote, and how referendums are run, with translated and accessible formats also made available. During the writ-to-writ period, the dedicated referendum website had over 10 million unique visitors.

## Media



The AEC distributed 24 media releases during the writ-to-writ period specific to the 2023 referendum. Thirteen in-person (and virtual) media briefings were conducted across Australia in the lead-up to the 2023 referendum and during the referendum period. The AEC held multiple briefings in the parliamentary press gallery, in every capital city and virtually. In addition, AEC spokespeople undertook more than 400 media interviews during the writ-to-writ period and responded to around 4,000 media enquiries. The AEC's media presence was the most active in its history, which was a deliberate approach to being accessible to combat what was the most disinformation about electoral processes experienced by the AEC.

## Social media

The AEC's social media accounts were very active during the 2023 referendum period. A total of 359 proactive posts were published across X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Threads, Instagram, and LinkedIn. The AEC also ran two 'Ask Me Anything' sessions on the r/Australia subreddit featuring the Electoral Commissioner, Deputy Electoral Commissioner, and the National Election Manager. The AEC received approximately 131,000 engagements to social media accounts during the writ-to-writ period, responding swiftly and with authority. There was a noticeable shift in the nature of content experienced online with more users questioning electoral integrity than ever before. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon for the AEC to experience false accusations regarding electoral processes, and threats and harassment online.

The AEC maintained open communication with several online media platforms, and engaged with Google, Meta, X, TikTok, Snap, Microsoft, and Reddit ahead of, during, and after the 2023 referendum. This engagement, led by the Defending Democracy Unit, was valuable in ensuring platform understanding of referendum processes and the types of content prohibited under the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984*. It also provided clear avenues for the AEC to refer online content that could undermine electoral integrity, including mis and disinformation about electoral processes.

## Videos

Educating the voting public around the more detailed parts of referendum delivery was also a key focus. Disinformation was countered through the creation and use of more than 60 short form videos specific to the referendum on the [AEC's YouTube channel](#) 'AEC TV'. The AEC used a [Disinformation Register](#) during the referendum with 14 particularly prominent pieces of disinformation about the referendum process listed. This included familiar conspiracy theories, such as the provision of pencils

at polling places was part of a plan by AEC staff to change the result by erasing votes, as well as new narratives specific to the referendum.

## Public notices

Public notices fall under the category of non-campaign advertising and are referred to within the AEC as state-based advertising.

This is part of the AEC's overall public information strategy and complements campaign advertising, public relations, media liaison, website content and other channels.

All referendum-time advertising aims to promote participation in referendums. State-based advertising specifically gives voters key information relevant to their state, territory, or local area.

The Referendum Act requires the Electoral Commissioner to advertise:

- the writ in at least two newspapers within the relevant state or territory, unless there is only one newspaper in that region, in which case the writ must be advertised in that newspaper (s 14 (1))
- notice of the appointment by name of the polling places for each division and those polling places in a division which have been abolished since the last election in that division, which must be advertised in a newspaper circulating in that division, on the Electoral Commission's website and in any other way considered appropriate by the Electoral Commissioner (s 16 (2))
- the location of early voting (pre-poll) centres and their hours during which voting can occur on the AEC website (including divisional offices) and remote mobile polling locations on the website (s 51(4)(b) & s 73AA(3A)). The Electoral Commissioner (or their delegate) may also choose to advertise these details in local publications, as they deem fit (s 51(4)(b) & s 73AA(3)(b)).

In addition to the legislated issue of writ and polling place advertising, the AEC also published the following public notices:

- **Remote Voter Services** – location and time listings for remote mobile polling being conducted in each state/territory (advertisements were run in all states and the Northern Territory).
- **Remote Voter Services pointer** – general remote voting services information pointing people to the AEC website for the latest information (advertisements were run in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, and the Northern Territory).
- **Over 70** – reminding older Victorian residents that they are required to vote in referendums (Victoria only, noting that up until 2020/21, it was not compulsory to vote in state elections if you were over 70).
- **Event clash** – reminding voters going to a particular event on referendum day that they still need to vote. Where applicable, these also listed special polling places at, or near the event (advertisements were run in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory).
- **Interstate visitors** – listing the details of interstate voting centres in each state/territory (advertisements were run in Queensland and the Northern Territory).

**Table 5: Public notices**

<b>Public notice</b>	<b>Placement date/s</b>	<b>Circulation</b>
Issue of writ	11 August 2023	2,845,000
Remote Voter Services	Several	605,172
Event clash	Several	662,700
Over 70s (Victoria only)	Several	2,872,043
Interstate visitors	Several	560,303
Polling places	13 October 2023	2,845,000

## Indigenous Electoral Participation Program

The AEC works to support the participation of First Nations peoples in elections and referendums through the Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP). The IEPP focuses on engaging with local partners to deliver community-led electoral participation initiatives to their communities. The AEC has established partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers and community groups to assist in driving enrolment, voter turnout, formality, and employment opportunities for First Nations Australians in elections and referendums.

While the IEPP was established over a decade ago, recent funding allocations from successive Commonwealth governments have enhanced the program, which now has a greater number of community partners, and new or improved services being incorporated into the AEC's Indigenous engagement activities.

### Partners

Through the IEPP, the AEC is continuing to form partnerships with organisations to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' electoral participation and has invested in the production of additional localised resources in First Nations languages. IEPP partners lead, co-design, and champion localised, culturally appropriate engagement in their communities. This includes collaboration with the AEC on the development of programs, outreach events, and the creation and dissemination of engagement materials. The AEC's political and issue neutrality requirements are accounted for in all partnership agreements and associated activities.

In the lead-up to the 2023 referendum, all IEPP partners were contacted to confirm their neutrality on the referendum topic. Where a partner organisation indicated they had taken a position on the referendum topic (either "Yes" or "No"), the contract was suspended until the end of the referendum period.

Neutral partners worked with the AEC during the referendum on various activities, including referendum education sessions, promoting and assisting First Nations Australians with enrolment queries, and the recruitment of temporary election workers.

See: [Appendix A – AEC IEPP Partnerships](#) for more detail about IEPP’s partners during the referendum

### Community electoral participation officers

Employing community electoral participation officers (CEPOs) is an initiative aimed at maintaining ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement and awareness throughout an electoral cycle. Casually employed CEPOs play an important role in providing electoral information to their local community, acting as a liaison between the AEC and remote communities and promoting and fostering awareness of electoral and referendum events.

Of the 82 CEPOs engaged ahead of the 2023 referendum, 42 spoke one or more local languages, covering 16 First Nations languages.



**Table 6: CEPO locations and languages**

State	Total No CEPO per state	Total No CEPO per location	Total No locations covered	Location	Total No languages spoken	Language*
NSW	1		2		0	
		1		Lake Cargelligo, Murrin Bridge		
NT	40		19		9	
		11		Alice Springs and surrounds		Arrente
		2		Angurugu, Groote Eylandt		Anindilyakwa
		1		Borooloola		Garrwa, East Kriol
		1		Finke		Arrente
		2		Galiwinku		Yolngu Matha
		3		Gapuwiyak		Yolngu Matha
		1		Gunyangara, Nhulunbuy		Yolngu Matha
		1		Hidden Valley Town Camp		Arrente
		1		Maningrida		Bararra, Kunwinjku
		3		Milingimbi		Yolngu Matha
		2		Ngukurr		East Kriol
		2		Ramingining		Yolngu Matha
		1		Santa Teresa		Arrente
		3		Tiwi Islands		Tiwi
		3		Umbakumba, Groote Eylandt		Anindilyakwa
		1		Wadeye		Murrinh Patha

State	Total No CEPO per state	Total No CEPO per location	Total No locations covered	Location	Total No languages spoken	Language*
		2		Yirrkala, Nhulunbuy		Yolngu Matha
Qld	9		7		1	
		2		Cherbourg		
		1		Damley Island		Yumplatok
		1		Ingham		
		1		Lockhart River		
		1		Torres Strait		Yumplatok
		1		Woorabinda		
		2		Yarrabah		
SA	5		4		3	
		1		Coober Pedy		
		1		Copley		Adnyamathanha
		2		Indulkana		Yankunytjatjara
		1		Pipalyatjara		Pitjantjatjara
WA	27		22		3	
		1		Broome, Dampier Peninsula & Bidyadanga		Creole
		1		Broome		Creole
		1		Coolgardie		
		1		Cue		
		2		Derby (West Kimberley)		Worrorra
		2		Geraldton		
		1		Halls Creek		
		1		Kalgoorlie		
		1		Kalumburu		

State	Total No CEPO per state	Total No CEPO per location	Total No locations covered	Location	Total No languages spoken	Language*
		1		Karratha		
		1		Kununurra (East Kimberley)		
		1		Mandurah		
		1		Marble Bar, Warralong		
		1		Moora		
		3		Mowanjum (West Kimberley)		
		1		Mt Barker		
		2		Mullawa		
		2		Norseman		
		1		Northampton		
		2		South Hedland		Nyangumarta
National Total	82		54		16	

\*Locations left blank – the CEPO spoke English only

The AEC also actively encouraged community members who speak First Nations languages to work in referendum delivery roles including as remote services delivery team assistants (Local Assistants) and Polling Assistants. Local Assistants are community members engaged to support voters in ensuring they are correctly identified and marked off the electoral roll and to provide localised language support as required. Around 230 Local Assistants were employed to support the voting process.

### In-language materials

The AEC provides in-language resources to further support the accessibility of electoral and referendum information. Using a combination of locally engaged staff, CEPOs, and translated audio materials, the AEC provides electoral and referendum information that is accessible and inclusive, especially in regions with diverse languages. The AEC continues to expand its in-language materials based on consultation and an evidence-based approach of communication requirements.

Examples of First Nations in-language materials produced for the 2023 referendum include:

- The official referendum booklet (which included ‘Your official Yes/No referendum pamphlet’ and ‘Your official guide to the 2023 referendum’), which was translated into 13 First Nations languages and published in audio format.
- Videos produced in 27 First Nations languages on the topic, “What is a referendum?”
- Audio recordings produced in 22 languages on the topic, “Misinformation and disinformation.”
- Videos on what to expect at the polling place and how to correctly complete a ballot paper were available in 22 languages on mobile devices at remote polling places.

**See:** [Indigenous Australians - Australian Electoral Commission \(aec.gov.au\)](https://aec.gov.au) and [Translated and accessible information - Australian Electoral Commission \(aec.gov.au\)](https://aec.gov.au) on the AEC website for more information

## Community consultation

### Aged care consultation

Health restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the AEC only conducted a limited amount of mobile polling in aged care facilities at the 2022 federal election; the 2023 referendum saw us return to an expanded offering. The AEC established an Aged Care Advisory Working Group comprising of representatives from across the sector including members from consumer peak bodies and profit and not-for-profit service providers and advocates to discuss enrolment and voting services and opportunities for improvement. This group helped the AEC make meaningful improvements to services and increase awareness and understanding of AEC processes across the sector.

### Remote voter services community engagement and consultation

The AEC provided remote voter services across Australia in more comprehensive and tailored ways than ever before. The AEC consulted extensively with communities and external stakeholders to decide the most appropriate level of polling service in remote locations. We worked directly with communities, either in person or via phone, engaging community by community, to develop the voting schedule to be as closely aligned to local needs as possible.

We considered known significant community activities, permit requirements, venue locations and availability of a secure room or location for ballot box security. We also considered the availability of Local Assistants and how to best source staff. We worked through community contacts, the IEPP network and its partners, as well as with our key service delivery partner, Services Australia.

The outcome of this work was a greatly expanded remote voter services footprint that saw the AEC remote service delivery teams visit more remote locations and spend longer at many of these places than for any previous electoral event. The AEC expanded its remote in-person polling from the 2022 federal election, including visiting 68 per cent more localities and increased time spent in communities by 113 per cent.

IEPP staff delivered 266 education sessions in Indigenous communities on the process of the referendum and how to cast a formal vote. During those sessions, staff let people know remote voting teams would be coming and what to expect.

The AEC also undertook extensive outreach with remote communities before and during the 2023 referendum to raise awareness about the remote polling schedule and provide updates. We took a multifaceted approach to ensure the widest possible reach of communication. This included advertising (newspapers, radio, television, digital, search and social), media outreach, posters for community noticeboards, SMS messages to voters, social media, and the AEC website.

5

Yes/No  
pamphlet



## Yes/No pamphlet

The Yes/No pamphlet is a legislative requirement unique to a referendum. As set out in the Referendum Act, the AEC is required to translate, print, and distribute the Yes/No pamphlet which contains the cases for and against the proposed law to change the Constitution.

The AEC's approach to producing and distributing the Yes/No pamphlet was carefully considered and meticulously planned.

We commissioned research to inform how we could best present the Yes and No cases equally, in order to minimise perceived bias towards either case. The AEC also issued submission guidelines to parliamentarians to ensure their cases met the legislated requirements. Once received, the cases were included exactly as provided without alternation or amendment.

In the current digital-first global environment, printing, and national distribution of the pamphlet within tight timeframes was a highly complex logistical challenge. We worked closely with our suppliers to ensure sufficient and appropriate paper stock was sourced well in advance, print and delivery schedules were achievable, secure and accurate distribution data was obtained, and all quality control processes were met.

In total, the AEC distributed over 12.8 million copies of the pamphlet throughout Australia. In addition to Australian households, pamphlets were also sent to historical, educational, and archival facilities, as well as to all voting locations overseas. We also produced versions of the pamphlet in translated and accessible formats, including international and First Nations languages, and a version for people who are blind or have low vision.

## Legislative requirements

In accordance with the Referendum Act, the AEC was legislatively required to prepare and distribute a pamphlet with the arguments for and against the proposed law to change the Constitution.

Subsections 11(1)-(3) of the Referendum Act set out the high-level procedure for the production of the pamphlet. This included that the AEC must send it to all addresses on the electoral roll (including silent electors).

Once the proposed law was passed through both houses of Parliament, members of parliament were requested to put forward their arguments in favour of or against the proposed law. These arguments were to be no more than 2,000 words and authorised by a majority of members of parliament who voted for or against the proposed law.

Under the Referendum Act, the Yes/No pamphlet was to be received by electors at every address on the electoral roll no less than 14 days before voting day.

## Preparation and distribution

### Background

In January 2023, the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022 (Amendment Bill) was before Parliament proposing to suspend Subsection 11 of the Referendum Act for any referendum held before the next federal election, thereby removing the legislative requirement for the AEC to produce and distribute a referendum pamphlet.

During this period, there was uncertainty as to whether a Yes/No pamphlet product would be required for the next referendum. Planning for this part of the referendum process was dependent on the outcome of the Amendment Bill.

The proposal to suspend Subsection 11 was removed in an amendment to the Amendment Bill on 22 March 2023, prior to Royal Assent on 27 March 2023, confirming the requirement for printing and distribution of the Yes/No pamphlet.

### What was the Yes/No pamphlet?



*Your official Yes/No pamphlet* (the pamphlet) contained the Yes and No cases as provided by Parliamentarians, and a statement showing the proposed alterations to the Constitution text.

The pamphlet formed a part of [Your official referendum booklet](#) (the booklet), a 24-page full-colour printed document that also included *Your official guide to the 2023 referendum* (the guide). The guide included key information including voting options, what happens at polling places and sample ballot papers with instructions on how to complete them.

In addition to the pamphlet and the guide, the booklet also included information about alternative versions available.

**Table 7: Yes/No pamphlet production and distribution timeline**

<b>19 June 2023</b>	<b>Constitution Alteration Bill was passed</b>
13 July 2023	Yes and No committees provided draft cases for word count validation, as per the deadline
14 July 2023	AEC advised both committees that their draft cases were under 2,000 words
17 July 2023	By 11:59pm Monday, the Yes and No committees provided their final authorised Yes and No cases to the AEC, as per the deadline
18 July 2023	AEC published the unformatted cases on the AEC website
21 July 2023	AEC typeset the Yes and No cases to create the Yes/No pamphlet, which was published on the AEC website
30 August 2023	The referendum booklet (containing the Yes/No Pamphlet and the official guide to the referendum) was published on the AEC referendum website The AEC also published a text-only version of the referendum booklet on the AEC website that could be used for screen readers
7 August 2023	Printing commenced
14 August 2023	Printing completed
16 August 2023	Household delivery commenced
8 September 2023	Translated versions in 34 languages published on the AEC referendum website
8-20 September 2023	First Nations translated audio versions in 13 languages published on the AEC referendum website
19-29 September 2023	Accessible version published
14 October 2023	Referendum voting day

## Design and market testing

It was critical the Yes and No cases were treated and presented equally, to minimise the risk of perceived bias towards either case.

Preliminary design options were prepared, and ORIMA Research was engaged to test the options. The research explored:

- how each design option was perceived in its treatment of the Yes and No cases
- which design option most effectively conveyed impartial treatment of the Yes and No cases
- the clarity of design and layout of each option and whether it aided or impeded engagement and readability, including:
  - appropriateness and relevance
  - layout, tone, and branding

- appropriateness of a foreword from the Electoral Commissioner
- distinction between the Yes and No cases, and the Official Guide content
- any other risks or issues raised during user testing.

In total, 122 people participated in the research between 17 to 18 May 2023. This included in-person and online focus groups across four states. Participants were from a broad range of demographic backgrounds, varying across age, income, and education. This included a range of cultural backgrounds, including 23 per cent from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background and 39 per cent from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

The key findings of this research were implemented, including the order in which to present the Yes and No cases, explanatory information, design, and layout.

## Submission guidelines for members of parliament

Upon passage of the Constitution Alteration Bill, the AEC provided submission guidelines and print specifications to the Yes and No committees. These provided information about the length, style, and format of the pamphlet.

The AEC sent the specifications and the template to all members of parliament on 20 June 2023 and published them to the AEC website. An addendum was provided on 6 July 2023.

## Publication

Both final authorised Yes and No cases were received by the required deadline of 11:59pm AEST Monday 17 July 2023. Word count processes confirmed both cases were under the required maximum of 2,000 words and met submission guidelines.

In order to make the cases available to the public as soon as possible, the AEC published the unformatted Yes and No cases to its website on 18 July 2023. These files were replaced when the designed version of the pamphlet was published on 21 July 2023.

Under the legislation, the AEC is required to print and send the Yes/No pamphlet to every address on the electoral roll not later than 14 days before voting day. To meet these requirements, the pamphlet was combined with the guide, and the printing process commenced prior to announcement of the date of the referendum. Consequently, the booklet was printed without the referendum date.

On the passing of the Constitution Alteration Bill, the AEC worked closely with its printing supplier to secure an adequate supply of paper. We considered the quality and ink retention of the paper, product weight, foldability, and cost, as well as environmental factors.

The 13 million copies of the booklet were printed on certified plantation pine grown and milled in Tasmania.

## Distribution

The AEC took a multifaceted approach to distribute the booklet and meet legislative requirements. The primary method, an unaddressed mail service, covered every Australian residential address on Australia Post's records. This covered approximately 98 per cent of addresses on the electoral roll, and copies of the booklet were delivered between 16 August 2023 and 14 September 2023.

To reach additional electors, the AEC also used personally addressed mail, including to caretakers, those in hotels, motels, settlements, caravan parks, marinas/houseboats, defence housing, hospital

accommodation, convents, commercial premises with residences, and boarding schools. Bulk copies of the booklet were also delivered to facilities such as refuges, prisons, aged care facilities, hostels and to overseas posts.

In total, the AEC distributed over 12.8 million copies of the booklet throughout Australia. Additional booklets were sent to historical, educational, and archival facilities across Australia.

In adopting the above approach, the AEC surpassed the minimum delivery requirement outlined in the Referendum Act.

## Translated formats

There is no legislative requirement to translate the Yes/No pamphlet, however, the Referendum Act contains provisions for translation, digital presentations, and accessible formats.

The AEC aims to ensure public information materials are widely available to all Australians and provides information in different languages and accessibility formats.

The pamphlet was translated into 34 culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) languages and 13 First Nations languages. Each translation had a primary translator and an assurance translator. At least one translator had to hold a credential conferred by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, and the other had to meet the requirements of ISO-17100<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 8: Translation languages for the Yes/No pamphlet**

CALD languages	Arabic, Assyrian, Bengali, Bosnian, Burmese, Cantonese, Croatian, Dari, Greek, Hazaragi, Hindi, Italian, Karen, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Macedonian, Maltese, Mandarin, Nepali, Persian/Farsi, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Serbian, Sinhalese, Spanish, Tagalog/Filipino, Tamil, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese.
First Nations languages	East Side Kriol, Eastern Arrernte, Kawaw Kalaw Ya, Kimberley Kriol, Ngaanyatjarra, Pintupi Luritja, Pitjantjatjara, Tiwi, Warlpiri, Western Arrarnta, Yankunytjatjara, Yolngu Matha and Yumplatok.

## Accessible formats

The booklet was made available in formats suitable for voters who are blind or have low vision. Vision Australia produced the following formats which were published on the AEC website:

- e-Braille
- e-Text
- Audio.

The following formats were available in hard copy on request by calling the AEC Contact Centre:

- Braille – Grade one (embossed paper hard copy)

<sup>1</sup> ISO-17100, published by the International Organization for Standardization, provides requirements for the core processes, resources, and other aspects necessary for the delivery of a quality translation service that meets applicable specifications.

- Braille – Grade two (embossed paper hard copy)
- Large Print (printed paper hard copy)
- CDA Audio (on CD)
- Audio MP3 Audio (on USB)
- Audio DAISY Audio (on USB)
- E-Text (on USB)
- E-Text (email).

In addition, the guide was developed in Easy Read format and published on the AEC website. The pamphlet was not produced in Easy Read because of the level of interpretation required for this format.

# Regulation and security



## **Regulation and security**

The environment surrounding the 2023 referendum was different to that of any other electoral event in the AEC's history. Where campaigners at federal elections are usually party affiliated, the referendum saw many individuals and entities campaign who would not usually do so. This meant an increased AEC focus on areas such as authorisations and funding and disclosure to ensure there were appropriate education, regulation, and compliance mechanisms in place.

The contested information and security environment presented the AEC with new risks and challenges, particularly regarding physical and cyber security, and the robustness of our information technology systems.

# Authorisations

On 23 March 2023, Parliament passed the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Amendment Act 2023*. As a result, the requirements for the authorisation of referendum communications in Part IX of the Referendum Act were amended to ensure consistency with the authorisation scheme under Part XXA of the Electoral Act.

Under section 110C of the Referendum Act, the AEC is responsible for investigating and ensuring compliance with the authorisation of referendum communications.

## Referendum authorisation requirements

An authorisation is designed to enable voters to know the source of a communication that is seeking to influence how they will vote. In the lead up to the referendum, the AEC used all available resources to inform and educate the public and entities on the authorisation requirements of the Referendum Act and the *Commonwealth Electoral (Authorisation of Voter Communication) Determination 2021* (the Determination). This included:

- writing to registered political parties, associated entities, significant third parties, Members of the House of Representatives, Senators, and any other person or entity who appeared to be spending money campaigning at the referendum (collectively called ‘referendum entities’)
- providing guidance to individuals and entities seeking specific assistance on the authorisation requirements through the AEC’s Indigenous Electoral Participation Program and our public engagement team
- publishing guidance and resources on the AEC website including: the [authorising referendum communication page](#), a [referendum backgrounder](#) and a [referendum authorisation flowchart](#).

## Regulatory approach

The AEC’s regulatory approach is set out in the [regulatory action policy](#). This regulatory approach enables the AEC to assess each alleged breach and determine the proportionate response. For the referendum there were a lot of people and entities campaigning who did not usually campaign at federal elections. Given the limited experience of these entities, the bulk of the AEC’s regulatory activities for the referendum focused on providing those people and entities with directions and resources to understand and comply with their obligations. Where non-compliance is more serious or systemic, or a person or entity has been warned and fails to rectify an improperly authorised communication, the AEC will consider court action to seek an injunction or civil penalties.

The AEC works with a range of stakeholders to monitor referendum matter and address potential breaches of the authorisation requirements. Potential non-compliance with the authorisation requirements may come to the AEC’s attention from:

- state and federal police
- referrals from other government departments
- tipoffs from the public via the AEC’s online [complaints and feedback forms](#)
- direct contact with the AEC’s authorisation section
- the AEC’s social media presence (for example, X – formerly Twitter)
- engagement with social media companies

- engagement with state electoral commissions
- monitoring and anti-avoidance programs.

## Compliance – investigations outcomes

From 30 March 2023 to 31 October 2023, the AEC’s regulatory law team investigated 616 complaints relating to communications and conduct that may be in breach of the Referendum Act.

Most of these complaints (a total of 414 or 67.2 per cent) related to breaches of the authorisation requirements in section 110C of the Referendum Act. Of these complaints, issues surrounding non-complying print media communications were the most common (47.6 per cent), followed by social media (32.4 per cent).

A significant number of complaints (16.9 per cent), related to section 122 of the Referendum Act, which regulates misleading and deceptive referendum communications.

Some common observations and sources of frustration from stakeholders were:

- The size of the authorisation. Investigations of authorisation complaints found a number of referendum communications had very small authorisations, too small for electors to notice, particularly where signage was displayed at an inaccessible location and were unable to be approached.
- Complexity of the authorisation requirements for social media.
- The authorisation requirements of text messages, allowing the authorisation to be included as a weblink (when clicking a weblink is contrary to the government’s ‘Scam Watch’ advice).
- The distribution of anonymous unauthorised print material, such as flyers.
- The number of campaign telephone calls with no clear authorisation message.
- Employers and educational institutions displaying referendum material, causing some electors to become uncomfortable in their places of work and/or education.
- Campaign signage with same/similar colouring to AEC signage.
- The truth of the information within the referendum material, which the Referendum Act does not regulate. This includes both the Yes/No official pamphlet, as well as matter produced by official and private campaigners.

**Table 9: Summary of Referendum authorisation complaints investigated and breaches detected**

Communication type	Communications investigated	No breach	Under Investigation	Breach	Action taken on breaches	Breaches remedied	
Social media	134	61	1	72	<i>Warning letter*</i>	40	34
					<i>Education letter</i>	12	12
					<i>Referred to social media platform for action</i>	3	3
Signs and print	197	103	1	93	<i>Warning letter*</i>	34	27
					<i>Education letter</i>	9	9
Other communications	83	68	2	13	<i>Warning letter*</i>	8	7
					<i>Education letter</i>	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>178</b>			

\*some warning letters related to multiple breaches

In addition to investigating complaints, the AEC also responded to 54 public queries about the authorisation requirements. The regulatory law team answered these queries with a range of educational supports, including sending letters, internal advice, and standard external responses. Additionally, the AEC sent educational letters to significant stakeholders, including all members of parliament, senators, registered political parties, and significant third parties. This outreach was part of a proactive authorisation education drive in the lead-up to the referendum.

### Misleading or deceptive publications

It is an offence under section 122 of the Referendum Act to print, publish or distribute, or cause, permit or authorise to be printed published or distributed, any matter or thing that is likely to mislead or deceive an elector in relation to the casting of a vote in a referendum. This offence only applies to communications printed, published, or distributed during the formal referendum period (being the period commencing on the day of the issue of the writ for the referendum and ending at the latest time on the voting day for a referendum at which an elector in Australian could enter a polling booth).

The offence under section 122 of the Referendum Act broadly aligns with the misleading or deceptive publications offence under section 329 of the Electoral Act.

The AEC received 104 complaints relating to misleading or deceptive referendum materials. Of these, 97 related to purple Yes23 signage. After investigation, zero complaints were substantiated.

# Security

## Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce

As outlined in Chapter 1, the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce (EIAT) and EIAT Board work together to provide information and advice to the Electoral Commissioner on matters that may compromise the real or perceived integrity of federal electoral events.

In preparation for the referendum, the EIAT participated in several scenario exercises. These exercises prepared the EIAT to respond to events with the potential to impact the integrity of the referendum, such as physical security threats, cyber intrusions, foreign interference, and disinformation campaigns.

The EIAT met daily from the issue of the writ until stood down for the referendum, to monitor for any threats to the integrity of the referendum process. Ahead of and during the event, EIAT members shared information regarding the physical security environment, recognising the risks to electoral integrity posed by the increased harassment of AEC staff, the prevalence of electoral mis and disinformation, and protest activities occurring in the vicinity of polling or counting.

The AEC's innovative blend of proactive and responsive measures to combat mis and disinformation about referendum processes were largely effective, though electoral mis and disinformation present an ongoing risk to perceived and actual electoral integrity. Of particular concern is how narratives online can translate into physical security risks for AEC staff. During the referendum, individuals promoting conspiracy theories and misinformation engaged in disruptive and, at times, threatening behaviour, filming and harassing AEC staff at polling places and count centres and attempting to identify some staff members online. This behaviour is an ongoing significant concern for the AEC.

The EIAT did not receive any referrals for the referendum, and successfully facilitated inter-agency engagement and information sharing to support electoral integrity. On 28 November 2023, the EIAT Board provided formal advice to the Electoral Commissioner that "EIAT agencies did not identify any foreign interference, or any other interference, that compromised the delivery of the 2023 referendum and would undermine the confidence of the Australian people in the results of the referendum".

**See:** [Media Release – Taskforce advice provides assurance on 2023 referendum](#)

## Cyber security

Throughout the referendum neither the AEC nor its security partners detected any targeted or disruptive cyber-attacks against AEC systems.

The AEC maintains strong working partnerships with relevant security agencies who provide additional operational assurance. This includes close engagement with the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), which assisted with assurance for the referendum. Prior to the referendum, the AEC completed several activities to further strengthen the security of its systems, including but not limited to:

- assurance activities of the AEC's cyber security posture against the ACSC's Essential Eight maturity model, to meet set targets
- penetration testing of critical systems and supporting IT infrastructure
- operation of the AEC's cyber security monitoring service which supported the referendum under a heightened model

- completion of Infosec Registered Assessors Program assessments for multiple critical referendum systems
- issuing internal authorisation for relevant IT systems to operate. This was undertaken in alignment with the AEC's cyber security governance program to ensure the risks associated with systems and applications are known, remediated where appropriate, and ultimately accepted by the organisation.

Despite heightened cyber security threat levels globally, the AEC's cyber security posture ensured the highest level of security for the 2023 referendum.

**See:** [Information Technology systems](#) section below for more information on how the AEC ensured the operating efficiency of its IT systems for the referendum

## Physical security

The AEC grappled with a complex physical security environment prior to and during the 2023 referendum. Building on the rise in anti-government sentiment from the previous election, the referendum topic was highly emotive. This resulted in several rallies and demonstrations which were facilitated through the sharing of disinformation on social media and other web platforms.

The blending of the AEC's protective security function into the AEC's Command Centre enabled an enhanced and multifaceted approach to addressing protective security issues across our sites. Media and digital platforms were actively monitored for groups of interest and possible security threats. Australian Federal Police were embedded with the AEC to monitor physical demonstrations with the potential to affect AEC offices and polling places and to assist with the monitoring of security incidents and reporting on persons of interest.

The National Emergency Management Agency's National Situation Room was also utilised to monitor for potential disturbances as well as intelligence on upcoming demonstrations. EIAT members collaborated closely to ensure the AEC had the latest threat information and could respond to any adverse developments.

The AEC managed the physical security environment by implementing a range of measures:

- provided security briefing materials and instructions to polling staff on the management of security incidents
- monitored and provided security guards as required so that AEC people, assets, and information were protected during the referendum
- provided powder safes and training to respective state/divisional offices to safely screen suspicious mail received during the referendum
- conducted approximately 36,000 pre-employment screens including criminal history checks for specified polling official positions.

Verbal and physical incidents between campaigners and the general public outside of polling locations remains a concern, as well as filming and taking photos in polling places. The AEC continues to gather incident and risk data post-referendum that will form the basis for identifying key security trends and inform the broader security strategy for future electoral events.

**Table 10: Tracked security incidents (as of 8 November 2023)**

<b>Security incident category</b>	<b>Volume of security incidents</b>
Vandalism or damage of property	17
Threat to process*	72
Threat to other/self	55
Threat to agency personnel	55
Theft or loss of agency property	11
Security control issues	49
Public – photo/filming	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>

\* *Threat to process – requests for the writ, questioning the process, conspiracy theorists, campaigners impeding the 6-metre line and general disruption outside of the polling place and the 6-metre line.*

## Information technology systems

A key challenge faced by the AEC was to ensure its legacy IT systems had the capacity to support both internal and external demand throughout the planning, delivery, and execution of the referendum. Public-facing systems manage online enrolment checking, support postal vote applications, provide services such as ‘where to vote’, and provide results on voting day through the [Tally Room](#) and [Media Feed](#). Internal IT systems support the planning and delivery of the referendum including managing polling places, supporting the temporary election workforce, and countless other tasks.

Load and capacity testing is used to ensure the AEC’s IT systems can handle the expected number of user interactions while also maintaining both the availability and usability of these systems. All the AEC’s IT systems underwent testing and assurance prior to the referendum. However, those seen as critical to the outcome of the referendum, such as the Tally Room, Media Feed, and the AEC website, are further tested through an independent load and capacity program. The systems tested include:

- election planning and delivery IT systems
- IT systems supporting the temporary election workforce
- public-facing IT systems supporting enrolment, postal votes and voters who are blind or have low vision
- public-facing IT systems supporting voting and the publication of results.

Observations from previous events help the AEC to predict likely volumes of traffic to online services. These predictions are used to identify baseline performance levels. Actual targeted levels of performance significantly exceed the baseline performance. In this way, the AEC can be assured that unexpectedly high levels of traffic do not degrade IT system performance.

The AEC's testing also includes scalability, the ability to handle increased load and ensures all systems function as intended and meet the planned performance benchmarks.

Post-referendum analysis showed IT systems functioned as expected and operated within the tested parameters. The AEC will continue to develop its load and capacity testing program, looking to leverage any future advances in technology in this area, leaving it well positioned for future successful delivery of federal electoral events.

Further, through the Election Systems Modernisation Program, the AEC is undertaking a large-scale uplift of its legacy IT infrastructure and systems used to plan, deliver, execute electoral events. The Program aims to address significant risks to electoral integrity and improve the citizen experience and engagement by replacing legacy election and roll management systems with modern, secure, and citizen-focused technologies.

# 7

## Staffing and training



## **Staffing and training**

Staffing and training preparations commenced for the AEC long before the writ was issued.

The AEC undertook a substantial program of development and upskilling of the workforce to increase the capability and agility of staff.

Extensive preparations were made to ensure the substantial cohort of Temporary Election Workforce (TEW) that are so vital to delivering a federal event, received adequate role specific training alongside operational, cultural, and neutrality training.

A unique dimension of staffing for this event was the requirement for staff to confirm their issue neutrality. This considerable training effort helped to effectively manage the integrity and impartiality of all staff employed through the referendum.

The AEC also leveraged the skills and capacity of the APSC through a secondment program, drawing on APS staff who were then deployed across Australia in a range of operational roles.

## Staffing

The AEC's event workforce is a blend of staff from across the Australian Public Service (APS) and communities throughout Australia. Our people include APS employees engaged under the *Public Service Act 1999*, statutory appointments, the non-ongoing event surge workforce, external engagements (labour hire, contractors or consultants), and the significant temporary election workforce engaged under the Electoral Act. The AEC staffed the referendum drawing on a combination of permanent APS staff, referendum surge staff, secondments, and the temporary election workforce model.

### AEC staff

A total of 4,200 staff were employed by the AEC on referendum voting day, 14 October 2023. This includes APS ongoing and non-ongoing, casual and labour hire workforce, event surge rolls, and secondments from other government agencies.

**Table 11: Referendum workforce on 14 October 2023**

Location	Headcount*	Percentage**
<b>National Office</b>		
National branches combined	1,074	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,074</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>State Offices</b>		
New South Wales	899	21%
Northern Territory	41	1%
Queensland	583	14%
South Australia	239	6%
Tasmania	130	3%
Victoria	901	21%
Western Australia	333	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,126</b>	<b>74%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4,200</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* includes ongoing, non-ongoing, casual, secondment and labour hire (excludes TEW; contractor/consultants (12) and INDIGO project (157) staff).

\*\* percentage of total workforce (4,200)

# Partnerships and secondments

## Australian Public Service contingent workforce

The AEC used the referendum as a capability building opportunity for APS staff on secondment, which included a pilot APS remote voter services (RVS) contingency workforce. Through an expression of interest process, the AEC received over 150 applications from 29 agencies, exceeding expectations. In total, 69 APS staff were seconded from seven partner APS agencies and three electoral management bodies (EMBs).

The secondees were trained as remote voter services team leaders and deployed during the three-week period of remote voter services delivery. Secondees were also trained to assist other voting services, including mobile polling and Officers in Charge (OICs) for voting day. This is a successful demonstration of the APS responding as 'one APS', and working together for a common cause, while also removing the need to activate a formal APS surge request.

During referendum delivery, 56 secondees (81 per cent) were deployed as part of our contingent workforce into service delivery roles, including 19 secondees (27 per cent) into RVS delivery teams and six secondees (9 per cent) into mobile delivery teams. Secondees were also trained to assist in other voting services, including 15 secondees trained in mobile polling and 36 secondees deployed as OICs for voting day. Secondees were deployed to regional locations in Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory.

The AEC intends to further develop the APS RVS contingency workforce pilot and create an expanded program for secondees for future electoral events. This will occur in partnership with the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) and state and territory government departments and EMBs.

## Temporary election workforce

The AEC places a major focus on attracting, training, and deploying our temporary election workforce (TEW). A capable, agile, and professional workforce is essential for the AEC to mobilise to deliver any electoral event. On announcement of an electoral event, the AEC has a limited timeframe to engage and train its temporary workforce. Having the appropriate number of capable staff at the right time is crucial to the efficient and effective conduct of electoral events.

The temporary workforce is employed under the Electoral Act and the terms and conditions of their employment are set out within a collective determination. The AEC maintains a national register of interest for people who may be offered temporary work during electoral events. To register interest in working for the AEC as part of the TEW, applicants must:

- be an Australian Citizen
- adhere to the standards of political and issue neutrality
- be over the age of 18 to work in a polling official position – those under 18 years of age may work, however cannot manage or issue ballot papers.

While every electoral event is likely to have its own workforce challenges, the requirement for strict issue neutrality was a unique consideration for this event and created challenges with sourcing TEW. In addition, large numbers of community organisations publicly declared their position in relation to the referendum topic, so it was not possible, while adhering to neutrality requirements, to mobilise these organisations to promote TEW opportunities within their local communities.

For the referendum, a multifaceted approach to attraction and retention was used to target the almost 100,000 people needed to build a temporary workforce that reflected the diversity and needs of the Australian community.

A suite of communication materials was developed to make people aware of job opportunities and to encourage registrations. This suite included artefacts such as artwork designed for the general community, and for First Nations communities. The materials conveyed key messages in formats suitable for paid advertising including digital display advertising, digital social advertising, press advertising (including digital formats), as well as for inclusion in a Digital Promotion Kit for distribution to community organisations.

Other materials included scripts for radio and digital audio advertising, which were developed into recorded sound files for distribution to select networks, and scripts for advertising employment opportunities and the types of roles available on job platform sites.

The approach included media and paid advertising (for example social media and digital banners), as well as advertising on job platforms such as Seek, LinkedIn and Indeed. It also included maintaining regular contact with registered TEW applicants. These 'keeping in touch' communications encouraged applicants to register and maintain their information through our dedicated temporary employment systems.

The target figure for TEW attraction was 350,000 expressions of interest, on the basis this would provide a pool of sufficient suitable candidates and cover churn and contingency needs. Despite the political and issue neutrality challenges, these outreach activities generated a 24.5 per cent increase in registrations of interest across the period 1 July 2023 (commencement of recruitment advertising) to 14 October 2023 (voting day), with a total of 346,779 in the potential TEW pool.

There were 99,133 temporary election positions available during the 2023 referendum. These positions were filled by 84,781 individuals, with many working in more than one position. During the referendum, 38,807 TEW staff identified they had previous federal election experience within the last six years. This equates to 46 per cent of the temporary workforce engaged during this event.

During November 2023, the AEC conducted a survey to capture views about the referendum employment experience of our TEW. Outcomes from this survey will inform TEW engagement and employment strategies for future events.

**Table 12: Temporary Election Workforce staffing numbers**

State	Early voting positions	Voting day positions	Other positions	Total positions
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,042</b>	<b>69,963</b>	<b>18,128</b>	<b>99,133</b>
Australian Capital Territory	168	1,233	281	1,682
New South Wales	3,420	23,540	5,480	32,440
Northern Territory	271	353	105	729
Queensland	2,377	12,405	3,690	18,472
South Australia	726	5,801	1,204	7,731
Tasmania	217	2,509	382	3,108
Victoria	2,740	16,929	5,159	24,828
Western Australia	1,123	7,193	1,827	10,143

## Diversity

### Support for First Nations colleagues

The topic of the referendum saw much debate across all forms of media, which was not always civil or well informed. This created a potentially challenging environment for many of our staff, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, balancing family and community expectations with impartiality and neutrality obligations. Some media and social media narratives questioned the integrity of the AEC's people and processes. Additionally, we often saw poor behaviours towards our people.

Acknowledging this environment, the AEC worked closely with experts from our employee assistance program (EAP) provider and sought input from First Nations employees to create a suite of additional supports for the referendum period. This program included:

- an onsite clinician available to all AEC people, for individuals and managers, and for team meetings
- a First Nations clinician-led Yarning Circle for First Nations colleagues
- opt-in outreach calls for all AEC people
- debriefing for individuals and teams during and post-event.

In addition, a Connect and Share group met monthly. This group was established with the support of the People Branch for First Nations employees to connect, share, and support each other in a safe

environment. Members of this group could share their stories and experiences and ask questions of other group members who may have dealt with similar situations as the referendum approached, during the event and afterwards. The group is open for all First Nations employees to opt-in.

Throughout this period, our people also had access to the regular EAP services, including a specific telephone line staffed by First Nations clinicians. A focused communications campaign was created to promulgate information about the importance of wellbeing and how to access services. These communications included links to AEC-initiated options for support, and to mainstream options such as 13Yarn.

Feedback has confirmed that these supports were well received and useful to staff.

## Support for employees with disability

A disability contact officer (DCO) function within the People Branch was established during regular business and prior to the referendum, serving as a point of contact for all AEC employees with disability, and their managers and colleagues. During the referendum the DCO provided advice and support on a range of workplace adjustment requests, and they will continue working with staff to provide this ongoing support.

**Table 13: AEC employee diversity profile on 14 October 2023**

Diversity category	Headcount	Workforce representation (%)
CALD	139	3.3%
First Nations peoples	34	0.8%
Staff with a disability	65	1.6%
Women	2,826	67%

**Table 14: AEC employee age profile on 14 October 2023**

Age range	Headcount	Workforce representation (%)
18–24	427	10.2%
25–34	599	14.3%
35–44	641	15.3%
45–54	894	21.3%
55–64	1,132	27.0%
65 and above	507	12.1%

## Temporary election workforce

The AEC is committed to increasing the diversity of the temporary election workforce to reflect and support the community it serves. Strengthening the AEC’s inclusive culture and increasing the number of the temporary workers with diverse backgrounds promotes cultural safety and inclusion for its workforce. Strategies to increase the workforce diversity included:

- targeted sourcing and attraction strategies to fill the 242 dedicated bilingual and 943 First Nations polling assistant positions
- encouragement of TEW staff to use their language skills to support voters and improve services to voters in a polling place. The AEC initiated a community language allowance, recognising the contributions these staff make to the electoral process
- an improved national approach to engaging community members to work as remote voter services delivery team assistants (local assistants).

A diverse workforce is essential as the AEC continues to modernise a user-centric electoral delivery model. The AEC will continue to work closely with the Disability Advisory Committee and other disability representative organisations to enable increased participation of people with a disability in the temporary election workforce.

**Table 15: TEW diversity profile during the referendum period**

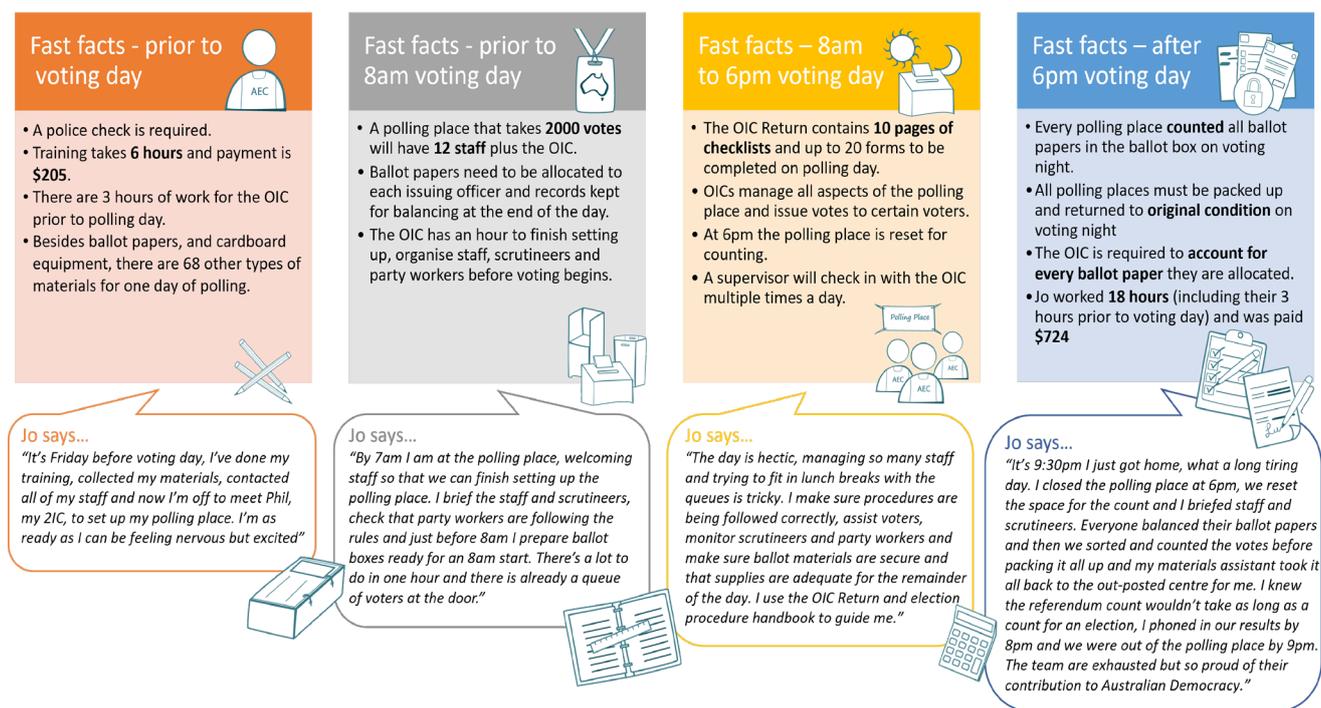
Diversity category	Number of employees	Number of positions
First Nations people	2,149 (2.5%)	2,420 (2.4%)
People from non-English speaking background	9,955 (11.7%)	11,175 (11.3%)
People who speak a language other than English – Indigenous languages	113 (0.1%)	127 (0.1%)
People who speak a language other than English – all other languages	15,037 (17.7%)	17,085 (17.2%)
Person with a disability	2,192 (2.6%)	2,590 (2.6%)

These figures are based on staff self-declaration and are expressed as a percentage of total TEW workforce of 84,781 people and 99,133 TEW positions respectively.

## Emerging workforce risks

Traditionally, the election workforce is engaged and trained in the weeks leading into an event (offers of employment cannot be sent until the date of an event is known), but this model is becoming outdated and proposes a delivery risk in the contemporary and complex operating environment. Training the temporary workforce is similarly challenging. Staff receive just-in-time training in the weeks or days before they undertake their role, and this training must equip staff to perform roles that are often highly complex, such as Officers in Charge of polling places.

Figure 12: The life of an Officer in Charge



Staff are expected to take in a lot of information in a short period of time, then deliver and lead in a high-pressure environment. Errors made by staff working to this tempo with limited training can have a direct impact on voter participation, public confidence in the integrity of elections and on the AEC's reputation and, in turn, create a cycle of additional pressure and scrutiny on staff. The AEC is currently considering how to tackle this challenging issue –something experienced by many EMBs globally - ahead of future events.

Australians who join the AEC's temporary election workforce are everyday people who put themselves forward to ensure to the AEC can provide polling in their community, and to support democracy more broadly. The AEC is grateful to all those who serve as part of this critical workforce.

## Training

Learning and development is an integral part of professionalising our workforce. The AEC continued to make a significant investment in training and developing its core workforce, delivering programs designed to further build critical operational and leadership capabilities.

### Training for operational leaders and staff

The AEC's core workforce undertakes training programs focused on building and enhancing critical operational and leadership capabilities relevant to electoral event readiness and delivery. This training also promotes compliance and quality assurance within the AEC's operational environment. Specifically, it includes:

- planning and preparation – activities required to open the doors to voters, such as the close of rolls, premises, staffing and training.
- service delivery – activities and knowledge required to offer voting services, such as certified lists, postal voting, mobile polling, formality, voting day operational rhythm.

- scrutiny and post-polling – activities required to deliver a result, such as declaration vote exchange, envelope management, scrutiny types and ballot paper reconciliation.

The training is structured in a manner that supports the AEC's core workforce to:

- **learn** the information they need to know in order to perform their role to the quality and standard that is expected
- **practise** by engaging in activities to improve and develop identified skills and behaviours in a safe and supportive learning environment, a national declaration vote exchange rehearsal and a preliminary scrutiny rehearsal
- **apply** their learning by participating in activities to demonstrate they possess the knowledge and skills to successfully perform their role.

## Training for senior leaders

The AEC also provides dedicated leadership training and development to all Executive Level and Senior Executive Service staff in the AEC aimed at building the AEC's leadership capabilities and further enhancing the professionalism of its leaders. This work helps the AEC realise its vision of being 'a leader in refining and delivering best practice in election management.'

## Neutrality

An integral part of the role of an AEC employee is to demonstrate and maintain political and issue neutrality, both personally and professionally. To support AEC staff to understand and adhere to this requirement for the referendum, the AEC Political and Issue Neutrality Statement was developed. An excerpt is provided below.

*The AEC's role is to successfully deliver an impartial referendum with the highest levels of integrity. A referendum by its very nature is generally about an issue. While political parties and other entities may be active in the referendum debate, the purpose of the referendum is to either approve or reject the proposed amendment to the Constitution. The AEC is required to be neutral not just with political actors involved in the referendum (political neutrality), but also on the issue that is the subject to amend the Constitution (issue neutrality).*

To support this requirement a Neutrality and Referendum Spending eLearning course was created, and all AEC staff were automatically enrolled in this course which supported them to:

- identify the behaviours required to maintain strict issue and political neutrality in the lead-up to and throughout the conduct of the referendum
- identify the government spending requirements on referendum communications defined by section 11 of the Referendum Act and how this information applies to the AEC.

All AEC staff were required to complete this eLearning course.

Content from this eLearning course was also incorporated into the online training for the TEW and online training provided to the AEC's delivery partners including Services Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and contracted security providers, ensuring all staff who worked on the referendum understood the need to be politically and issue neutral.

The AEC also developed a plain English guide [‘Referendum workforce: being impartial and issue neutral at the AEC - what you need to know’](#), available on the AEC website. This simple question and answer format not only provided information on electoral integrity but also reiterated the importance of fostering an inclusive polling place and workforce that fully supports electoral participation.

## TEW training

Training for the AEC’s temporary election workforce is tailored to each role, depending on the level of responsibility and complexity of the role. A total of 40 role-specific training programs were delivered for the 2023 referendum, using a blended learning approach with a mix of online training, face-to-face instructor-led training and/or briefings, election training videos, and an election procedure handbook. This approach enables the AEC to deliver quality training in the short period the AEC has available to employ and train its TEW once the dates for an electoral event are announced.

Referendum training for the TEW was built on the successful delivery of training at the 2022 federal election. Highlighted in the TEW survey results from this event was 85 per cent of survey participants indicating they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their training, and over 80 per cent agreed that it adequately prepared them for their roles.

All TEW were required to complete, at a minimum, online training prior to commencing their role. This included a new eLearning course on working at the referendum which covered topics on political and issue neutrality, security, disinformation, health and wellbeing, and inclusive and respectful service to voters. The AEC trained 383 external facilitators who, working with subject matter experts, delivered face-to-face instructor-led training to identified TEW staff.

8

# Service offering



## Service offering

While voting – in and of itself – is a simple act, a mammoth effort is required behind the scenes to deliver what is one of Australia's most complex logistical events. The AEC has a proud history of providing the highest standard of electoral services and the 2023 referendum was no different.

Our focus on electoral integrity through the values of quality, agility and professionalism was at the core of our *2023 Referendum Service Plan*, which set out the five standards underpinning our service delivery throughout the event. The 2023 Voter Survey indicated we met all these standards with a high degree of operational excellence. Overall confidence in the voting system and the AEC remained consistent with the 2022 and 2019 elections.

Like all service operations around the world, COVID-19 affected the kinds of services the AEC was able to provide for the 2022 federal election. For the 2023 referendum, we were able to return (for the most part) to pre-COVID-19 service levels. In addition, we offered remote voter services and mobile polling to more people and in more places than ever before.

We are also grateful to the broad range of service providers who assisted us in providing these high-quality services, including government agencies such as Services Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Austrade, and many commercial organisations providing print, logistical, security, storage, computer, postage, metrics, and scanning services.

# Service Plan

The [2023 Referendum Service Plan](#) outlined the AEC's commitment to providing the highest standard of electoral services by outlining key voting services and standards. The AEC's focus on electoral integrity through the values of quality, agility and professionalism was at the core of the Service Plan. Five standards underpinned the Service Plan.

Standard 1: Voters receive timely and accurate information

Standard 2: The AEC delivers a high-quality service

Standard 3: Votes are counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and Referendum Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result

Standard 4: The public and stakeholders have confidence that the referendum process is well managed

Standard 5: Referendum processes are informed by health advice.

## **Standard 1: Voters receive timely and accurate information**

The AEC supported effective participation in the referendum by ensuring information provided to the public was timely, accurate, comprehensive, and easy to understand and did this through a variety of channels.

The *Official Referendum Booklet* was a key part of this approach. This was a 24-page full-colour printed document that included two key publications: the official Yes/No pamphlet (the pamphlet) and the official guide to the 2023 referendum (the guide). The *Official Referendum Booklet* was delivered to approximately 11.5 million households and was a critical component of the AEC's referendum public information campaign, and included:

- a message from the Electoral Commissioner
- tips to check the source of electoral communication
- early voting options
- information about who has to vote, where to vote, and postal voting
- a summary of what happens at polling places
- sample ballot papers, with instructions on how to complete them.

The *Official Referendum Booklet* also included information about alternative versions (translations and accessible versions). There was also a [practise voting tool available on the AEC website](#) for members of the public to practice voting in a referendum.

As outlined in chapter 4, the AEC also:

- conducted a national advertising campaign across television, radio, print, out of home, cinema, digital and social
- made information available on the AEC website
- worked closely with the media to disseminate timely and accurate information
- leveraged social media

- shared information with stakeholders, community leaders and community groups, and requested they distribute information through their channels
- ensured information was available in accessible formats.

**See:** [Chapter 4 - Engagement and participation](#)

The AEC operated a general enquiries telephone line available to both domestic and overseas voters. Voters could also contact the AEC through dedicated interpreting lines, the National Relay Service or via the AEC's online enquiries form. Through the AEC's service provider, LanguageLoop, interpreting services in 19 languages were available by calling a dedicated telephone number. Callers could listen to recorded messages in language or be put through to an interpreter. There was also a general number people could call for languages other than the core 19. Recorded messages included information on enrolment, polling places, postal voting and where to find translated material on the AEC website. These recordings were progressively altered during the voter services period and after voting day. The AEC received over 2,500 calls through interpreters.

### **Standard 2: The AEC delivers a high-quality service**

The AEC delivered a high-quality service which allowed voters to ensure their enrolment was up to date and facilitated voting based on individual circumstances.

The electoral roll closed at 8pm (local time) on Monday 18 September 2023. We achieved a record enrolment rate of 97.7 per cent, a record Indigenous enrolment rate of 94.1 per cent, and a record youth enrolment rate of 91.4 per cent.

Legislative change to the Referendum Act allowed the AEC to begin conducting mobile polling in remote locations up to 19 days before voting day. A total of 795 venues were visited in 586 remote locations; the largest remote voting service ever offered. In addition to remote voting services, the AEC had mobile polling teams visit aged-care facilities, mental health facilities and prisons.

The AEC offered postal voting services in line with legislative requirements after the writ had been issued on Monday 11 September 2023 at 6pm (local time). Electors could apply via the AEC website, through paper forms or through third-party applications. The AEC delivered postal vote packs through Australia Post domestically and DHL for international voters. Altogether, more than two million postal vote packs were issued.

The AEC operated a secure telephone voting service for citizens who are blind or have low vision and for Antarctic electors. The service allowed voters to register and vote in secret from any location without attending an AEC office or polling place. Over 3,500 calls were made to the AEC's blind and low vision registration telephone line.

In conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Austrade, we offered in-person overseas voting at 107 overseas posts in 78 countries.

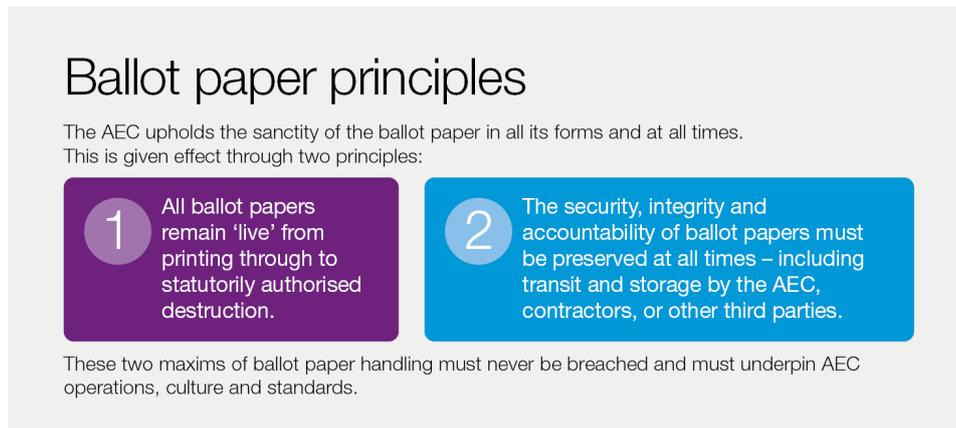
### **Standard 3: Votes are counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and Referendum Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result**

The AEC ensured count processes produced a timely and accurate result and managed the count in a transparent manner.

The AEC Tally Room website displayed progressive results throughout referendum scrutines. The writ for the referendum, and with it the final confirmed referendum result, was returned on 6 November 2023.

In line with our ballot paper handling principles (see Figure 12 below), all AEC ballot papers were tracked, secured and accounted for at all times. Scrutineers played an important role in the referendum, providing a further level of transparency to the count process. Scrutineers are entitled to be present at all stages of the vote and the count, and in addition to providing extensive information in the Scrutineers Handbook, the AEC set up a dedicated telephone line for enquiries from scrutineers.

**Figure 13: AEC ballot paper handling principles**



#### **Standard 4: The public and stakeholders have confidence that the referendum process is well managed**

The AEC established policies and procedures in alignment with the provisions of the Referendum Act.

Following the success of the [Disinformation Register for the 2022 federal election](#), the AEC again established the [Disinformation Register](#) to combat prominent instance of mis or disinformation about the referendum process. This did not include fact-checking claims about the Yes or No cases for the referendum. Throughout the referendum, the AEC saw extensive disinformation circulated and worked quickly to combat this through various channels.

The AEC treated complaints seriously, promptly and in line with the AEC's [Complaints Management Policy](#). Complaints could be lodged online or via telephone, and all were managed in line with the principles and processes set out in the policy. Complaints about electoral fraud were managed according to the AEC's fraud control policy and procedures. The overwhelming majority of complaints about the referendum process itself related to misinformation.

The high level of trust the Australian public had in the AEC's conduct of the referendum was reflected in the results of the 2023 voter survey which was conducted following referendum voting day, which showed over 90 per cent of respondents had confidence in the AEC's delivery of electoral services. Further, the 2023 APSC [Survey of Trust in Australian public services](#) showed that 87 per cent of people reported having trust in the AEC.

#### **Standard 5: Referendum processes are informed by health advice**

The AEC took the health and safety of election workers and voters seriously. The AEC worked closely with relevant health authorities to ensure that COVID-19 safety measures were guided by relevant health advice and other sources of information including the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and Safe Work Australia.

The AEC encouraged election workers and voters to wear face masks in polling places if required, practise good personal hygiene, use hand sanitiser, and maintain physical distancing. The AEC provided clean pencils and signage about hygiene and undertook regular touchpoint cleaning. Training for all early voting and voting day staff included content on COVID-19 and work health and safety. They also received work health and safety briefs at counting centres.

**See:** [Appendix B – Performance against the Service Plan](#) for more detailed reporting on service outcomes.

## Service footprint

Like all service operations around the world, COVID-19 affected the kinds of services the AEC was able to provide for the 2022 federal election. For the 2023 referendum, we were able to return (for the most part) to pre-COVID-19 service levels. In addition, we offered polling to more people, in more places than ever before. There were 63 remote services delivery teams, servicing our remote footprint of 795 premises across 586 localities. In addition, there were 482 other mobile teams visiting aged care and other facilities, 554 early voting centres and 6,974 polling places. The 2023 referendum saw the AEC out further and wider than ever before.

## Interstate voting

A range of services were available to interstate voters over the full voting period. Electors who were planning to be interstate for the referendum could vote by pre-poll, postal vote or in an interstate voting centre on voting day. Current legislation does not allow standard polling places to issue interstate ballots on voting day. To ensure a service is provided on voting day, the AEC continued to operate some pre-poll locations as interstate voting centres.

## Overseas

Voting options available for Australians living or travelling overseas included in-person and postal voting.

The AEC, in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Austrade, offered in-person overseas voting at 107 overseas posts in 78 countries, one of the largest overseas footprints ever offered.

Security and service delivery considerations precluded 16 posts from being able to provide services for the referendum. A small number of posts required a reduction in the hours originally published for in-person voting due to local factors. The Tel Aviv post was only able to offer in-person voting for seven days, instead of the planned 10 days due to the security situation escalating in that region.

All materials, ballot and non-ballot, were transported to and from overseas posts using diplomatic mail services to ensure timely and secure delivery.

Australians were informed of voting options through various channels including the AEC website, Smartraveller, and social media. For local arrangements, the posts communicated to overseas voters through their own website and social media channels, including information on available services.

## Overseas postal voting

Prior to the 2022 federal election, it was identified that due to COVID-19 and the changing nature of postal services, standard postal services would not meet AEC requirements and legislated

timeframes for overseas postal votes. Postal votes must be completed by voting day and returned by the 13<sup>th</sup> day after voting day to be valid. The AEC initiated the use of a point-to-point international courier service to ensure overseas voters received their postal votes as swiftly as possible.

For the 2023 referendum, the AEC again used an international courier to deliver postal vote packs to Australians overseas. To further reduce potential postal delays, overseas voters were able to return or mail their completed postal votes to nominated local overseas posts. A total of 103 international locations acted as a postal vote collection centre, in addition to offering in-person voting.

## Remote voter services

A new remote voter services policy was developed to enhance the remote service offering and increase voter access for Australians living in remote and very remote areas.

An initial list of remote locations was identified using the Australian Bureau of Statistic's Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+), 2021. Using this methodology ensured a nationally consistent approach to identifying and classifying locations.

A nationally consistent consultation approach was established to identify the highest level of service offering available to these locations using remote voter service policy parameters. The approach included the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation Framework, reflecting a human rights-based methodology for First Nations communities, including good faith engagement. Broad consultation principles were agreed to, which recognised the diversity of communities located in remote and very remote Australia.

Remote Service Planning Teams in each state and territory consulted with communities and external stakeholders in their region using a number of resources developed to support a nationally consistent approach.

Consultation was either in person or via telephone and included questions to gain information on the most suitable day and time for polling, if there were any known significant community activities, possible venue locations and access to a secure room or location for ballot box security. Questions in relation to permit requirements and the availability of Local Assistants to employ to assist with polling on the day were also included.

Based on consultation outcomes, a revised list of locations was established to form the new remote voter service footprint and subsequent service delivery schedules for remote polling for the 2023 referendum and future electoral events. The additional week of mobile polling allowed through the legislative change implemented for the referendum, further enabled the enhanced service offering to be realised in remote areas.

## Mobile

Mobile polling in non-remote areas occurred over the 12 days leading up to voting day, as per standard election timetables. The AEC works to ensure this unique service is targeted to voters who need it the most. Sometimes these people cannot feasibly access other services such as early voting centres, postal voting, telephone voting (where eligible) or polling places.

Based on a comprehensive review of mobile polling after the 2022 federal election, involving input from the AEC's Aged Care Advisory Group, the AEC established a nationally consistent and targeted approach to providing this service. This included visits to almost all residential aged care facilities nationally, specialist homelessness services, and, for the first time, residential mental health services.

In addition, consultation was undertaken with all corrective services departments across the states and territories to determine the most appropriate voting service for prisons and other correctional facilities in each jurisdiction. Where authorities determined that postal voting was the preferred service, the AEC worked collaboratively with them to ensure those impacted were able to vote via mail. This included providing information and resources, enrolment packs, and paper postal vote application forms to each impacted correctional facility. Most states and territories determined mobile polling as the preferred voting service. The AEC worked closely with the departments and individual facilities to develop delivery plans, identify the best days and times for voting and the number of AEC staff required to provide the service. This was a complex logistical exercise due to the operational and security requirements of each facility but resulted in a very high enfranchisement rate of prisoners relative to previous events.

### **Mobile polling support cells**

The AEC engages closely with a range of establishments where groups of voters might reside ahead of and during events. A key aim of this service is to improve the accuracy of the roll prior to mobile polling service delivery and to support staff working closely with voters who experience significant barriers to electoral participation. The AEC provided information, resources, and support to ensure staff understood enrolment processes, legislative requirements for enrolment activities, and felt confident to assist their residents/clients.

Nationally, 24 dedicated staff provided enrolment services to over 3,100 establishments and voting options support to over 800 establishments who did not accept or were unable to have mobile polling. Additionally, these staff also provided outreach services to hospitals and mining sites in the months leading up to the referendum to ensure hospital staff, patients, and mining site staff knew about available voting options. This service included providing information and resources to over 700 hospitals nationally.

### **Electronically assisted voting**

The AEC partnered with Services Australia to provide electronically assisted voting (telephone voting) to electors who are blind or have low vision and electors working in Antarctica.

The service allowed eligible electors to cast their vote in secret with a relative degree of independence. The vote was completed with the assistance of staff while maintaining the voters' anonymity during the voting process.

## **Service partners**

Many aspects of a national referendum require the expertise of external service providers. This enables staff to focus on their event delivery areas of expertise, ensuring that the Australian public are provided with the highest quality services, using the latest technologies and systems. Management of these providers and their subsequent supply chains was an integral factor in the facilitation of the referendum.

For the referendum, four print providers were engaged to print approximately 20 million ballot papers for voting in polling locations across Australia and overseas. The contracted freight provider completed 162 shipments to move ballot papers from the print provider to divisions at out-posted centres (OPCs) across Australia. An additional four print providers were engaged to print 24,216 certified lists with our freight provider completing 151 shipments of certified lists to divisions at OPCs.

Over the course of two weeks the referendum ballot papers were printed at print provider sites in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, and Brisbane. The delivery of this election material from these sites to the AEC's 57 OPCs enabled further distribution to 8,071 polling locations and mobile teams across Australia.

## Deakin University

Since 2017, the AEC has maintained a metrics program to develop an evidence base to help inform improvements to policy, procedures and voter services. The AEC partners with Deakin University's Institute for Intelligent Systems Research and Innovation to develop a data collection program, and to deliver expert level data modelling and analysis. The referendum metrics program has collected data on a range of election activities including polling and counting. These metrics will inform updates to staffing for polling places and scrutines to improve voter and staff experience in future electoral events.

## Services Australia

The AEC has a successful business partnership with Services Australia in a range of areas. For the 2023 referendum the AEC and Services Australia partnered to deliver:

- Contact Centre services, including:
  - Telephony
  - Email
  - Mail house services
- Electronically Assisted Voting services by telephone for:
  - Blind and low vision Australian citizens
  - Australian citizens working in Antarctica
- Remote Voter Services by:
  - Delivering voter services to remote and very remote locations across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory
- Voter Uplift and Enrolment by:
  - Increasing enrolment and voter participation in targeted areas.

## Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade

The AEC successfully collaborated with the DFAT and Austrade to provide voting services to Australians overseas. These partner agencies provided both premises and staff to facilitate in-person voting and postal vote collection services to enable the enfranchisement of Australians overseas. The AEC utilised the DFAT mailroom through their diplomatic mail service (operated by DHL) to distribute and return both ballot and non-ballot material to and from all posts.

For the referendum, 107 overseas posts in 78 countries provided pre-poll voting services during the two weeks prior to voting day, with a small number of posts operating on voting day. This represented a return to pre-COVID-19 in-person voting options for overseas voters.

## Computershare

As with the 2022 federal election and subsequent by-elections, Computershare managed the scanning of paper postal vote applications and the print and lodgement of postal vote certificates. Over 257,000 paper applications were scanned and processed across Australia. Additionally, more than 2 million postal vote packs were printed and sent to voters from Computershare sites in Sydney and Melbourne.

Computershare are also our partner in post-event voter communication, including printing and lodging Voter Advice letters in December 2023, and will assist the AEC in dispatching the first round of non-voter letters in January 2024.

## FujiFilm

The AEC partnered with FujiFilm to scan 24,612 paper certified lists, or 14,288,200 individual page images. Updates to the process allowed lists to be rechecked for incorrect polling official marks, improving the accuracy of AEC voting data and helping ensure that non-voter letters were not sent to voters that attended polling places. In total, 6,936,809 marks were captured by this process.

FujiFilm are also our enrolment mailing partner and distributed over 597,835 acknowledgement letters to electors who updated their enrolment from the announcement of the referendum to voting day.

## Australia Post

Another critical partner during the referendum was Australia Post, who managed not only the delivery of the 2 million postal votes, but also the return of almost 1.8 million postal votes to the AEC. Australia Post also worked closely with the AEC and Computershare to ensure the use of Express Post during the week before voting day was effective.

Australia Post was also a critical partner in the distribution of the Yes/No pamphlet, ensuring over 11.5 million households received this publication.

## Dell Australia

Dell Australia have successfully supplied and managed Electronic Certified List (ECL) equipment and services for all electoral events since June 2013. The ECL deployment numbers for the referendum were 5,312 ECL packs and 1,057 printers.

There are very tight timeframes to build and deliver ECLs. Dell partnered with Renew IT to build the ECLs at locations in Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne. Dell partnered with Team Global Express (TGE) to manage the priority delivery of ECLs by secure hand-to-hand service to the 57 AEC OPCs nationally.

## DHL

DHL have successfully delivered postal vote packs to electors overseas since the 2022 federal election. Due to the decline in postal services and increased transit times, DHL was contracted to help ensure that electors received their postal vote packs within the legislated timeframe. 55,720 postal vote packs were couriered to voters overseas.

## Team Global Express (TGE)

TGE supplied a range of crucial services for the referendum, including distributing ballot papers, certified lists and division finders from printers, distributing cardboard to OPCs, distributing and collecting cardboard polling equipment to and from polling places, many secure collections and dispatches of declaration votes as part of the declaration vote exchange, as well as the sometimes very complex distribution and return of materials between OPCs and remote / regional polling staff and polling places.

## Client engagement

A dedicated AEC contact centre operated throughout the referendum period in partnership with Services Australia. The call centre was a highly successful activity, delivering a high-quality service to the Australian public for the duration of the referendum.

**Table 16: Contact centre operating hours**

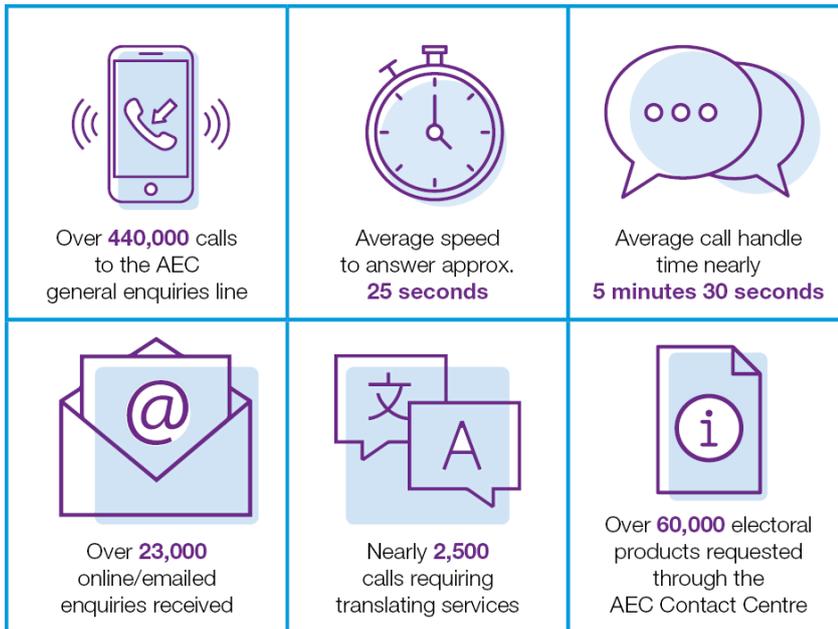
<b>Time period</b>	<b>Service hours</b>
Pre-event	09:00 to 17:00 (local time) Monday to Friday
Event service delivery	08:00 to 20:00 (local time) 7 days a week from issue of writ to voting day
Voting day	07:00 to 21:00 (local time) Saturday
Day after voting day	09:00 to 17:00 (local time) Sunday
Post-voting day (2 weeks)	09:00 to 17:00 (local time) Monday to Friday

The most common queries received by the AEC during the referendum included postal voting (application processes and status updates), polling place issues (including locations and opening hours), and enrolment (including status and processes to update).

Translation services were well used during the 2023 referendum. Top languages were Mandarin (approximately 30 per cent), Cantonese (nearly 20 per cent) and Vietnamese (approximately 7 per cent), with call demand generally peaking mid-morning (around 11am). Most demand for in-language services came from New South Wales, followed by Victoria.

For the 2023 referendum, a dedicated scrutineer hotline was established to assist those scrutineers who may not have undertaken that role before. Demand to the hotline was limited over the event period but peaked as expected in the lead-up to voting day.

**Figure 14: Client engagement**



## Voter survey outcomes

The AEC conducted a voter survey for the 2023 referendum, with fieldwork beginning on 16 October 2023 and concluding on 27 October 2023. The survey received 1,114 responses.

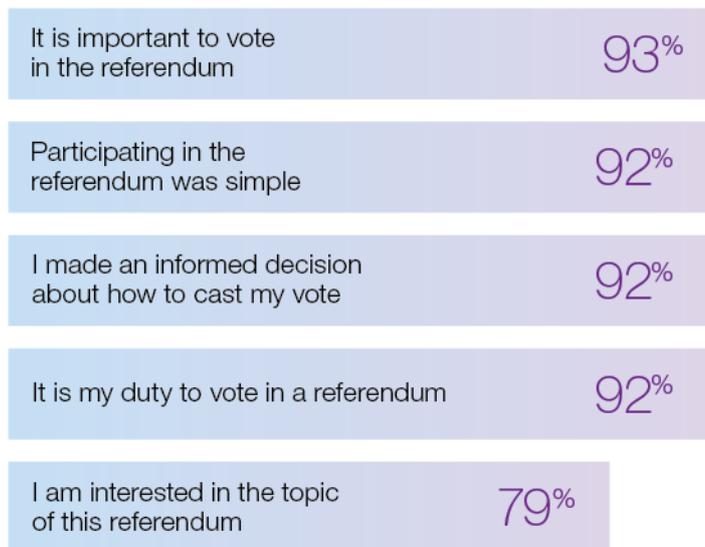
Overall confidence in the voting system and the AEC remained consistent with the 2022 and 2019 elections, with 90 per cent of respondents stating they had confidence in the AEC delivery of electoral services and 93 per cent confident that the vote was counted as intended.

**Figure 15: Voter survey results - Confidence in voting systems and the AEC**



The voter survey also measured attitudes towards the referendum itself. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that it was important to vote in the referendum, that it was simple to do so, they made an informed choice in casting their vote and that it was their duty to vote in a referendum. A smaller, although still very strong, majority agreed they were interested in the topic of the referendum.

**Figure 16: Voter survey results – Attitudes towards the referendum**



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# Voting



## Voting

The AEC offered a range of voting options to suit different voter circumstances throughout the referendum. This included postal voting, pre-poll voting in-person, interstate and overseas voting, mobile voting, remote voting, telephone voting for eligible voters, and in-person voting on voting day.

Throughout the referendum voting period, 15.9 million Australians were able to have their say - freely. This included 6.4 million people casting their vote before voting day (including approximately 98,000 via mobile polling), 1.7 million people voting by post, and nearly 7.8 million people then casting their vote on voting day.

# Postal

Postal vote applications were made available after 6pm on Monday 11 September 2023 in accordance with the timing of the issue of writ. The AEC commenced the production of postal votes on Saturday 23 September 2023, following the legislated close of rolls and completion of certified list extracts. The deadline to apply for a postal vote was 6pm on Wednesday 11 October 2023.

## Postal vote applications

While in referendums, applications for postal votes do not open until the issue of the writ, the AEC commenced receiving postal vote applications, via forms provided by campaign entities, from 4 September 2023. The AEC continued to receive postal vote applications dated before the issue of the writ up until applications for postal votes closed on 11 October 2023.

This meant a sizeable number of electors submitted ineligible postal vote applications. To minimise the risk of disenfranchising these people, the AEC worked with stakeholders and also contacted over 16,300 applicants via email, telephone, and letter to inform them that their application was invalid as they had signed their application before the writ was issued (being 11 September 2023) and to advise them of their reapplication or voting options.

Over the one-month application period, the AEC issued a total 2,073,918 postal votes for the referendum, a decrease of nearly 25 per cent from 2,731,088 at the 2022 federal election.

## Postal votes

The deadline to receive returned postal votes was Friday 27 October 2023, 13 days after voting day. A total of 1,793,453 postal votes were returned to the AEC by this date, representing 86 per cent of postal votes issued – a typical return rate for federal events.

## Postal vote design

Following the 2022 federal election, the AEC further updated the design of postal voting materials ahead of the referendum. The changes included:

- orientation of the postal vote certificate turned from portrait to landscape
- removal of unnecessary fields, reducing the number of fields to be completed and increasing font size and spacing
- coloured sections to visually separate the fields to be completed by the voter and their witness
- a new instructional pamphlet, with both textual and visual instructions
- a modified return envelope to include a checklist.

These changes led to a much higher compliance rate with legislative requirements for completion of the postal vote certificate elector and witness details, resulting in a rejection rate of only 2 per cent, lower than both the 2022 federal election (7.1 per cent) and 2019 federal election (3 per cent).

## Multiple/duplicate postal vote packs

Given the AEC's priority to ensure every elector's participation, postal votes are generally issued for a valid application, even if the information closely matches a previous application (exact duplicates are not reissued).

Duplicate applications can be more common among general postal voters (those who are registered to receive a postal vote for every electoral event), who may forget they are permanently registered and lodge an unnecessary one-off postal vote application as well.

If two are received, voters are instructed to only complete and return one postal vote and destroy the other one received. Each postal vote is uniquely bar-coded and matched to a specific elector on the electoral roll. If a voter completes and returns multiple postal votes, this will be identified as part of preliminary scrutiny checking. Only one postal vote for an elector will ever be admitted and counted by the AEC, and the voter will be considered a multi-voter.

## Interstate

A total of 554 pre-poll voting centres operated throughout the early voting period and 182 operated on voting day. In total, they issued 198,643 interstate votes. Of these, 69,010 were issued on voting day (compared with 52,860 interstate votes issued on election day in 2022 and 67,648 in 2019). Additionally, each of the 61 remote voter services teams issued interstate votes, totalling 3,141. Overall, 201,784 people voted at an interstate polling place during the event.

## Overseas

Through DFAT and Austrade, during the early voting period, 107 overseas posts issued 63,484 pre-poll votes and received 9,243 postal votes in total. London was the largest post, with 16,617 pre-poll votes issued and 1,463 postal votes received. An AEC representative was deployed to support the London voting centre with the anticipated high volume.

The AEC delivered over 55,000 postal vote packs to Australians overseas by international courier to help ensure their timely arrival. The postal votes returned to overseas posts, as with all other material, were transported by DFAT's diplomatic mail service back to Australia.

The AEC is proud to have returned to a more fulsome overseas voting offering following the necessarily restricted offering during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Mobile

For the referendum, 482 mobile polling teams visited 2,316 establishments and issued 107,986 votes (these figures are not inclusive of remote mobile teams). This included 75,736 ordinary and 32,250 declaration votes. Establishments visited included residential aged care facilities nationally, specialist homelessness services, prisons, and, for the first time, residential mental health services.

With the assistance and support of state and territory departments of corrections, the AEC was able to significantly expand mobile polling in prisons for the referendum. A total of 43 mobile polling teams visited 49 prisons across most states and territories and issued 7,274 in-person votes. This is a significant increase of 5 prisons in the previous event, in which only 51 in-person votes were issued.

The AEC also received 200 postal votes from people in prison. This resulted in over 7,400 prisoners across Australia voting in the referendum which is a significant increase from the 274 prisoners who voted in the 2022 federal election.

## Remote voter services

In response to community and stakeholder feedback, the AEC delivered remote voter services across Australia in more comprehensive and tailored ways than ever before for the 2023 referendum.

The AEC offered mobile polling, pre-poll voting and static polling places in remote and very remote locations. In total, in-person voting was offered in 585 localities across 801 premises. This was a considerable expansion of the AEC's 2022 federal election remote in person polling service. We visited 68 per cent more localities and increased the amount of time spent in communities by 113 per cent.

Remote mobile polling teams visited communities with as few as 10 people on the electoral roll, who were more than 20kms from a polling place. This service required the support of over 500 people to plan and coordinate, including 252 people across 63 mobile teams on the ground. We used 4WDs, helicopters, small planes and ferries and travelled 214,000 kilometres to make sure people had every opportunity to participate.

In addition, the AEC's IEPP staff delivered around 200 education sessions in remote communities. These workshops covered the process of the referendum, what happens at the polling place, and how to vote formally. During sessions, our staff also told attendees that remote voting teams would be coming to their community during the polling period.

The AEC employed around 230 local assistants. These people were employed to use their cultural and language skills to help increase participation in the voting process. It was important to have someone known to the community support the polling and advise the AEC on local issues that may arise. Many of our Local Assistants were bilingual and we also supplied teams in many locations with tablet devices with audio and video resources in 22 First Nations languages to help explain what happens at the polling place and how to correctly complete a ballot paper.

Delivery of mobile polling services in remote areas is a highly complex logistical exercise and this was managed closely by the AEC's Remote Operations Centre in Darwin. During delivery, our schedules were impacted by changes in community advice, unexpected weather events and safety concerns such as catastrophic fire conditions or flood warnings. Following schedule changes due to circumstances outside our control, or if the community requested that we return at another time (for instance, due to sorry business), the AEC arranged a return visit wherever logistically feasible.



## Pre-poll

A total of 554 pre-poll voting centre (PPVC) locations operated during the early voting period, compared with 540 at the 2022 federal election. These PPVCs issued 5,603,134 ordinary votes, a significant increase from the 5,071,528 ordinary pre-poll votes issued at the 2022 federal election. We also saw a corresponding rise in the number of declaration votes issued at PPVCs, with 642,069 issued compared with 563,423 in 2022.

The final day of the early voting period, Friday 13 October, was our busiest early voting day ever at PPVCs, with 1,171,354 votes issued (1,039,336 ordinary and 132,018 declaration), comprising 18.8 per cent of all votes issued at PPVCs for the entire period. This was the first time over 1 million votes had been issued in a single day during the early voting period.

## Electronic certified lists

An electronic certified list (ECL) is a more modern alternative to the traditional paper certified list. ECLs are used to mark off electors as they receive their ballot papers, in electronic format on a laptop.

The benefits of ECLs are manifold. They:

- reduce time taken to mark off electors (thereby enhancing the voter experience and reducing queues)
- help identify voters via multiple search functionalities
- reduce polling official or data capture errors in marking off electors
- result in fewer delays in uploading information to follow-on systems
- result in fewer mathematical errors within the Officer-in-Charge reconciliations and returns
- enable real-time visibility of ballot paper usage
- facilitate reduction in intentional and non-intentional multiple voting.

The AEC deployed 5,312 ECLs at the referendum. ECLs were used at all issuing points in:

- all early voting centres (PPVCs)
- all remote voter services delivery teams
- all mobile polling teams
- all interstate voting centres on polling day
- five multi-division static polling places in capital city central business districts.

In total, 5,711,828 ordinary votes and 682,334 declaration votes were issued using ECLs. This represents approximately 45 per cent of all votes issued in person at polling locations.

ECLs used for polling were reused by all divisions post-voting day for the preliminary scrutiny of absent and pre-poll declaration votes.

For the next federal election, the AEC intends to deploy ECLs to more issuing points on polling day as part of the government-funded *Polling Place Technology* project.

## Electronic assisted voting

The AEC used a prescribed telephone voting solution to issue 2,229 votes to electors who were blind or had low vision and 77 votes to people in Antarctica.

## Voting day

On voting day, the AEC operated 6,974 polling places at 6,650 different locations (some locations operated more than one polling place). 6,945,711 ordinary votes were issued on voting day (43.7 per cent of all votes counted), a slight decrease compared with 6,979,162 (45.1 per cent of all votes counted) at the 2022 federal election. This continues the trend of fewer people voting on the day – more than half of all votes occurred outside of voting day.

**Table 17: Voting day polling places**

<b>State</b>	<b>Voting day polling places</b>
New South Wales	2,397
Victoria	1,610
Queensland	1,230
Western Australia	699
South Australia	607
Tasmania	283
Australian Capital Territory	109
Northern Territory	39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,974</b>

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## Processing the results



## Processing the results

At any electoral event, counting the vote is a complex and time pressured exercise, with the Australian public accustomed to receiving a result on voting night. However, this continues to be a challenge as the majority of votes are now cast prior to voting day, voters can effectively cast their votes anywhere in Australia (and overseas), votes must be returned to their 'owning' electoral division for counting, and there are legislative limits on how and when we can undertake the count of certain categories of votes. Of note, the AEC must wait 13 days for the return of declaration votes, such as postal votes, and if the result margin is close, the outstanding postal votes may be material in determining the final result.

Counting commenced across all states and territories immediately after the polls closed at 6pm (local time) and results were published to the Tally Room in real time. Just after 7pm (AEST), enough results had been released to give commentators the confidence to call the referendum result.

The AEC announced that a mathematically certain result had been reached on Friday 27 October 2023.

## Pre-poll and postal vote count

Legislative amendments to mirror Electoral Act counting processes permitted the early extraction of referendum postal ballot papers from the Monday prior to voting day. Staff could also open pre-poll ballot boxes after 4pm on voting day to sort ballot papers, ahead of counting from 6pm. Those two amendments combined to support an early indication on voting night of the likely referendum result.

By the close of polling on 14 October 2023, more than 1.1 million postal votes had been extracted from envelopes and secured in sealed ballot boxes ready for counting. All divisions recorded postal results on polling night and continued to count and release results over the subsequent days. All divisions contributed to the more than 600,000 postal votes and more than 5.5 million pre-poll votes displayed on the Tally Room on polling night. This is the largest number of postal votes counted on voting night in the AEC's history.

## Voting night counting

Counting commenced across all states and territories immediately after the polls closed at 6pm local time and by around 7:30pm Australian Eastern Standard Time, enough results had been released to give commentators the confidence to call the referendum result. By the close of counting in the early hours of Sunday morning 15 October 2023, over 13.1 million votes, or 74 per cent of referendum enrolment, had been released to the AEC Tally Room.

Most votes issued to electors are ordinary votes where the elector is marked off and the ballot paper placed directly into a ballot box. This supports a better voting experience for the elector through faster processing times and allows the votes to be counted more quickly. The majority of votes counted on voting night are ordinary votes.

**Table 18: Types of votes counted on voting night**

Source	Number of votes
Ordinary votes issued at a polling place	6,944,244
Ordinary votes issued by a mobile polling team	12,756
Ordinary votes issued at a pre-poll voting centre	5,583,823
Postal votes	600,580
<b>All votes counted on voting night</b>	<b>13,141,403</b>

## Fresh scrutinies

Following polling day, all ordinary votes are, by law, rechecked, and updated results are progressively released. Fresh scrutinies of all ordinary votes occurred throughout the weeks following voting day.

Although not required under the Referendum Act, it is AEC policy to conduct a fresh scrutiny of all referendum declaration vote ballot papers. Fresh scrutinies of all declaration votes commenced with postal votes on polling weekend and continued throughout the following weeks.

The AEC must wait until the 13<sup>th</sup> day after voting day to receive and process all postal, overseas and other votes that are to be entered into the count. All initial and fresh scrutineers were completed by 2 November 2023, 19 days after polling day.

## Scrutineering

The Referendum Act sets out the appointment process for scrutineers at a referendum, as well as their rights and relevant offences.

Scrutineers play an important role in supporting the integrity and transparency of electoral events. Scrutineers can observe the casting and counting of votes during an election or a referendum to ensure that votes are counted accurately in accordance with the rules.

At an election, candidates are not allowed to enter polling places, except to vote. They are also not permitted to observe the 'scrutiny' (counting of votes) for elections in which they are candidates. Instead, they can appoint scrutineers to represent them during the polling and throughout the various stages of counting ballot papers.

In the case of a referendum, the following people have the right to appoint scrutineers:

- a) the Governor-General
- b) State governors
- c) the Chief Minister for the Australian Capital Territory
- d) the Administrator of the Northern Territory
- e) a person authorised by any of the above to act under the relevant subsection.

There are no candidates for election at a referendum. However, the registered officer and deputy registered officers of registered political parties may also appoint scrutineers.

Scrutineers must sign an undertaking in an approved form before they begin the performance of their duties (Referendum Act subsection 16A(3)). This – along with a dedicated scrutineer page on the AEC website and accompanying hotline - ensures scrutineers understand their obligations, including with respect to secrecy, electoral offences, and compliance with lawful directions. Scrutineers must wear badges, provided by the AEC, identifying the person as a scrutineer (Referendum Act subsections 28(2A), 73CB(4) and 90(2)).

## Sharing the results

The AEC published and distributed the results of the referendum in a very similar way to the results of a federal election, with which the public and media organisations are accustomed. The AEC reviewed and developed its Tally Room processes leading up to the referendum to ensure they were fit for purpose.

On and after voting night, results were published to the Tally Room in real time as votes were counted across the country. At its peak, around 3,000 users per minute accessed the Tally Room. Results were also shared in real time to participating media organisations via the AEC's Media Feed. These services mirrored the publication of results for other electoral events. Media and social media queries were answered swiftly throughout the counting period, complementing the information provided via the Tally Room and Media Feed.

Media organisations were also supported in their coverage of referendum results through several exercises conducted by the AEC:

- The Media Feed was tested three weeks prior to voting day, to give media organisations an early opportunity to understand how results data would be presented and to identify any problems. Altogether, 14 media organisations participated in this test. This was in addition to the standard rehearsal two days prior to voting day.
- The AEC's National Spokesperson ran a media briefing two days prior to voting day, dedicated to the counting process. This was intended to assist media organisations to understand the process, and thereby provide accurate information to the public on voting night. This open and on-the-record briefing was the first time the AEC conducted media briefings dedicated to the counting process, and was well received, with attendance from approximately 50 media representatives.
- The AEC coordinated two opportunities for media attendance at counting centres in Melbourne and Perth. Representatives from key media outlets (primarily broadcast) were briefed on the process, signed in to counting centres and permitted to undertake live and/or pre-recorded reporting and content capture. Participating media representatives appreciated the access and noted that it provided a level of visual transparency to the public.

## Turnout and formality

### Turnout

The referendum turnout rate was 89.95 per cent. In comparison, the turnout rate for the 2022 general election was 90.5 per cent and the turnout for the 1999 referendum was 95.1 per cent.

Turnout is measured as the number of votes admitted to the count (15,895,231) as a percentage of enrolled electors (17,671,784).

While the turnout rate for the 2023 referendum is slightly lower than previous electoral events, the number of enrolled electors is at its highest ever and given the declining rates of electoral participation in democracies worldwide, this is a very positive result.

### Formality

Following the trend of the 1999 referendum where the informality rate was a low 0.86 per cent for question one and 0.95 per cent for question two, the informality rate for the 2023 referendum remained low at 0.98 per cent.

**Table 19: Formality rates**

	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Formal: Yes	6,286,894	39.55
Formal: No	9,452,792	59.47
Informal	155,545	0.98
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,895,231</b>	<b>100.00</b>

### Informal Ballot Paper Study

After the conclusion of the referendum, the AEC undertook an informal ballot paper study to better understand how electors cast an informal vote, and to collect statistics on the number of ‘crosses’ used, should there be a future desire to test the claimed impact of this legislative interpretation. Divisions were directed to survey informal ballot papers after the return of the writ according to four categories. The categories asked to survey were:

- Cross
- Blank
- Number
- Other (which mainly included phrases, drawings, and scribbles).

A total of 8,140 out of 15,895,231 ballot papers were marked with a cross, which equates to around five per cent of all informal ballot papers and amounts to five hundredths of a percent of the total vote. Note that due to survey processes, there will be minor discrepancies between the overall study result and the certified results above.

**Table 20: Informal ballots**

State	Cross	Blank	Number	Other informal	Total
Australian Capital Territory	109	827	7	1,259	2,202
New South Wales	2,863	24,293	461	29,692	57,309
Northern Territory	58	273	21	466	818
Queensland	1,296	10,003	106	15,974	27,379
South Australia	600	4,583	83	6,218	11,484
Tasmania	239	1,363	19	2,412	4,033
Victoria	2,217	15,480	262	21,184	39,143
Western Australia	758	4,857	145	7,795	13,555
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,140</b>	<b>61,679</b>	<b>1,104</b>	<b>85,000</b>	<b>155,923</b>

## Declaration of results and return of the writ

The Electoral Commissioner announced the outcome of the referendum once the fresh scrutiny of ordinary votes was completed and it was mathematically certain – that is, that the number of outstanding votes cannot affect the result.

This publication occurred on the AEC website on Friday 27 October 2023.

In preparation for return of the writ, all divisions nationally must provide a final statement of results to the Australian Electoral Officers (AEOs) for their jurisdiction.

The statement must include:

- number of votes given in favour of the proposed law
- number of votes given not in favour of the proposed law
- number of ballot papers rejected as informal.

All divisions and state offices had certified their results by Friday 3 November 2023.

The Electoral Commissioner certified the national result, and, in accordance with subsection 98(1)(b) of the Referendum Act, the writ was returned to the Governor-General with an attached certificate of results on Monday 6 November 2023. Under subsection 98(2) of the Referendum Act, the Electoral Commissioner then published a copy of the certificate of results in the Gazette.

This copy of the certificate of results, once published and subject to any successful petitions in the Court of Disputed Returns, is deemed to constitute conclusive evidence of the result of the referendum.

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## After the referendum



## **After the referendum**

One of the final tasks of the referendum is to address apparent cases of multi-voting and non-voting. While the overwhelming majority of Australians meet their voting obligations, a small percentage do not. Multiple voting and non-voting are offences under the Referendum Act and the AEC's multiple and non-voter processes are a critical electoral integrity measure. Prior to the referendum, over 100,000 voters who were recorded as having failed to vote in the 2019 and 2022 federal elections were contacted and reminded of their obligation to vote in the referendum.

In early 2024, the AEC will provide 'apparent failure to vote' notices to apparent non-voters and commence the process of obtaining sufficient reason, issuing fines as an administrative penalty, or in some cases, initiate prosecution of offenders. The AEC will also conduct a thorough process to identify apparent multiple voters and request further information from them to make a determination as to whether there was an apparent case of multiple voting. Cases of apparent multiple voting may be referred to the Australian Federal Police or declared a designated elector.

## Voter integrity

A robust approach to addressing multiple voting and non-voting demonstrates the AEC's commitment to upholding electoral integrity.

### Multiple voters

Following the referendum, the AEC commenced a thorough processes to identify apparent multiple voters. Multiple voting is a criminal offence under the Referendum Act and cases of apparent multiple voting may be referred to the Australian Federal Police for further investigation. A multiple voter may also be declared a designated elector.

The decision to assign a voter designated elector status is based on the reasonable suspicion of the person having voted multiple times. The person will be required to make a declaration vote at future federal electoral events. In March 2023, designated elector provisions were extended to federal referendums.

Following the 2023 referendum, the AEC wrote to 3,179 electors whose names appeared to have been marked off the electoral roll more than once. This represents 0.02 per cent of voter turnout for the referendum, had no impact on the referendum outcome, and is largely consistent with previous federal electoral events (0.02 per cent for the 2022 federal election and 0.01 per cent for the 2019 federal election). The letters ask voters to provide further information to assist in determining whether there was a substantiated case of multiple voting.

### Non-voters

Ahead of the referendum, the AEC wrote to 196,146 electors who had been recorded as having failed to vote for the previous two federal elections. The letter reminded people of their voting obligation under Australian electoral laws.

In early 2024, the AEC will send 'apparent failure to vote' notices to 1,541,000 electors who appear to have failed to vote at the referendum. These letters will ask voters to provide the particulars of having voted or provide a valid and sufficient reason for having failed to vote. If the voter can do neither, they may be asked to pay an administrative penalty.

Failure to vote is a criminal offence under the Referendum Act. Following the completion of the non-voter notice process, some electors who did not vote may face prosecution if they have not paid the penalty or provided a valid and sufficient reason to the relevant Divisional Returning Officer.

## Court of disputed returns

Sections 101 and 102 of the Referendum Act enable the Attorney-General of the Commonwealth, the Attorneys-General of any state or territory, or the Electoral Commissioner, to file a petition in the High Court to dispute the result of the referendum. A petition must be filed within 40 days after the publication of the certificate of the results in the Gazette.

The 40-day period expired on Monday 18 December 2023. No petitions were filed.

## Funding and disclosure

A referendum disclosure scheme was introduced as a result of amendments to the Referendum Act. Among the changes was the establishment of a financial disclosure framework for referendum campaigning and donations broadly aligned with Part XX of the Electoral Act.

The referendum disclosure scheme aims to promote accountability and transparency. It informs the public about the financial dealings of entities and donors involved in the referendum process.

The primary amendments to the Referendum Act relating to financial disclosure were:

- an expanded definition of referendum matter – referendum matter is matter communicated or intended to be communicated for the dominant purpose of influencing the way people vote in a referendum
- a definition for referendum expenditure
- a referendum expenditure period
- disclosure obligations for referendum entities and donors
- a disclosure threshold of \$15,200
- restrictions on foreign donations.

As the writ was issued for the 2023 referendum on 11 September 2023 for voting to take place on 14 October 2023, the following referendum disclosure dates are relevant:

- the referendum expenditure period started on 11 March 2023 and ended on 14 October 2023
- referendum disclosure returns (referendum entities and referendum donors) are due to the AEC on 29 January 2024
- referendum disclosure returns will be published on the Transparency Register on 1 April 2024.

Figure 17: Funding and disclosure timetable



The AEC implemented the referendum disclosure scheme under two engagement campaigns:

1. **Awareness campaign** – website content describing referendum disclosure requirements and correspondence with known primary and secondary stakeholders. The awareness campaign was followed by expanded content development, describing what action will be needed by referendum entities and donors.
2. **Education campaign** – website content and correspondence to stakeholders clarifying dates of the referendum.

In addition:

- The AEC's website was updated with detailed information on the referendum disclosure scheme. There is information on referendum entities and referendum donors, as well as frequently asked questions, factsheets, and a video.
- The AEC directly reached out to 350 entities to provide information in relation to the scheme, including:
  - political parties, significant third parties, associated entities, third parties, members of parliament and senators
  - peak bodies representing a range of industries
  - entities identified by the AEC through environmental scanning processes.

As part of the campaign, the AEC issued media releases, digital and print advertising, and social media posts. During the digital and print advertising campaign period between 26 September 2023 and 13 October 2023, views of the AEC web page for referendum disclosure averaged 1,375 per day, up from 127 views per day prior to the campaign.

The AEC participated in a webinar hosted by the Stronger Charities Alliance, in partnership with the Australian Council of Social Service and the Australian Democracy Network. The webinar aimed to help charities understand the legal and regulatory framework for advocacy around the referendum. The webinar explained advice from the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) on advocacy around the referendum, and the AEC was invited by the ACNC to present on the referendum disclosure scheme and authorisation requirements.

Following the issue of the writ for the referendum, an education campaign for external stakeholders went live. This campaign included dates impacting disclosure specific to the 2023 referendum, updated website content, financial disclosure guides, further media releases, social media, and advertising.

The AEC's disclosure management system was upgraded to enable electronic lodgement of referendum disclosure returns to commence on the day after voting day.

## **Enforcement and compliance**

It is the AEC's expectation that all entities incurring referendum expenditure of more than \$15,200 during the referendum period will lodge a Referendum Entity Return regardless of the entity's status, and prior to the due date of 29 January 2024.

The AEC will assess each instance of non-compliance on a case-by-case basis, and failure to meet a disclosure obligation may result in regulatory action.

Referendum entity and referendum donor disclosure returns may be subject to AEC compliance review processes.

# Reader guides

## Abbreviations and acronyms

ACSC	Australian Cyber Security Centre
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AEST	Australian Eastern Standard Time
APS	Australian Public Service
APSC	Australian Public Service Commission
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CEPO	Community Electoral Participation Officer
Constitution Alteration Bill	<i>Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023</i>
DCO	Disability Contact Officer
DDS	DOR Delivery Scrum
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DLRR	Directed Level of Referendum Readiness
DOR	Director Operations and Readiness Group
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
ECL	Electronic certified list
EIAT	Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce
Electoral Act	<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EOI	Evidence of Identity
FDEU	Federal Direct Enrolment and Update
Home Affairs	Department of Home Affairs
IDC	Interdepartmental Committee
JSCEM	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
NEDC	National Election Delivery Committee

NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NOR	National Operations and Readiness Committee
OIC	Officer in Charge
OLP	Operational Leaders Program
OPC	Out-posted centre
PPVC	Pre-poll voting centre
RCC	Referendum Coordination Committee
Referendum Act	<i>Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984</i>
RMS	Reputation Management System
RRAP	Referendum Readiness Assessment Plan
RRRM	Referendum Ready Road Map
RSPT	Remote Service Planning Teams
RVS	Remote Voter Services
SLP	Senior Leaders Program
TEW	Temporary election workforce

# Glossary

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<b>Absent vote</b>	A declaration vote cast at a polling place outside of a voter's electoral division, but still within their state or territory.
<b>Australian Electoral Commission</b>	The Commonwealth agency responsible for providing Australians with an independent electoral service and enhancing their understanding of, and participation in, the electoral process.
<b>Australian Electoral Officer (AEO)</b>	The AEC's manager in each state and territory. The AEO is the returning officer for the Senate election in their state or territory.
<b>Ballot</b>	A method of secret voting, normally in a written form.
<b>Ballot box</b>	The sealed container into which an elector places a completed ballot paper.
<b>Ballot paper</b>	A paper used to register a vote. For an election, it will have a list of candidates standing for election. For a referendum it will ask whether the voter approves the proposed alteration.
<b>Certified list of voters</b>	The official electoral roll used to mark off the names of voters. The list contains the names and addresses of all eligible voters in a division.
<b>Compulsory voting</b>	Australian citizens 18 years and over are required by law to vote in federal elections.
<b>Constitution</b>	The <i>Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900</i> provides the basic rules for the government of Australia.
<b>Constitutional referendum</b>	A vote by all eligible Australian voters on any proposed changes to the Constitution.
<b>Court of Disputed Returns</b>	The jurisdiction established by the Act to determine disputes and the validity of elections.
<b>Declaration vote</b>	Where a voter is unable to be marked off the certified list at the time of vote issue, the vote is placed inside an envelope with the voter's details and a signed declaration, for subsequent determination of admissibility. It includes postal votes as well as absent, provisional and pre-poll declaration votes cast at polling locations.
<b>Declaration of poll</b>	A formal statement of the result of an election or referendum.
<b>Democracy</b>	Government on behalf of the people by their elected representatives.
<b>Designated elector</b>	The Electoral Commissioner can declare someone a designated elector if they are reasonably suspected of having voted more than once in the same election. This declaration can be made whether or not the elector has been convicted of a multiple voting offence. A designated elector may only vote by declaration vote, not by ordinary vote.

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<b>Division</b>	A geographical area of Australia (known as an electoral division or electorate) represented by a member of Parliament elected at a House of Representatives election.
<b>Division Finder</b>	The division finder is an alphabetical listing of all localities within a state or territory. It is used to determine which division any address within a state or territory belongs.
<b>Divisional Returning Officer (DRO)</b>	The AEC officer responsible for maintaining the electoral roll and conducting the election in each division. The DRO is the returning officer for the House of Representatives election in their division.
<b>Early sort of pre-poll ordinary ballot papers</b>	Ballot boxes containing pre-poll ordinary ballot papers can be opened from 4pm on election/voting day. The ballot papers are unfolded and, but they are not counted until after the close of polls at 6pm. Scrutineers can observe the early sort but they cannot challenge a ballot paper until after 6pm.
<b>Election Readiness Framework</b>	The planning structure used to support electoral event planning and preparation.
<b>Electoral Commissioner</b>	The officer who performs the functions of the chief executive officer of the AEC.
<b>Electoral roll</b>	The list of people entitled to vote in an election or referendum.
<b>Electronic Certified List</b>	Electronic list of eligible electors, accessed through an electronic device to allow polling officials to efficiently search the list of eligible electors and record that an elector has been issued their ballot paper/s.
<b>Enfranchise</b>	To give a person the right to vote.
<b>Enrolment</b>	You cannot vote at an election unless your name is on the electoral roll. Australian citizens 18 years of age and over (with a few exceptions) must enrol to vote.
<b>Enrolment form</b>	Application form to enrol to vote or to change your address in Federal and State/Territory elections. Enrolment forms are available <a href="#">online</a> or at AEC offices.
<b>Enrolment rate</b>	The enrolment rate (known as the participation rate until December 2014) is calculated by dividing the number of electors on the electoral roll by the estimated eligible population.
<b>Formal vote</b>	A vote cast in an election or referendum that has been marked according to the rules for that election or referendum and can be counted towards the result. A ballot paper that does not meet the rules for formality is called informal and cannot be counted towards the result.
<b>Franchise</b>	The right to vote.

<b>Fresh scrutiny</b>	The check and recount of ballot papers after election/voting day by AEC staff.
<b>General Postal Voter</b>	A voter who is registered to have postal ballot papers sent to them automatically by post.
<b>Informal vote</b>	A vote cast in an election or referendum that has not been marked according to the rules for that election or referendum and cannot be counted towards the result.
<b>Mobile polling team</b>	A team of polling officials that travels to residential aged care facilities, homelessness services, residential mental health facilities, some prisons, and remote locations to deliver an in-person voting service to voters who are not able to get to a polling place.
<b>Notebook Roll</b>	A notebook roll is a list of corrections that have been made to the certified list after the close of rolls. Although the Commonwealth Electoral Act allows for changes to the roll at any time, the scannable certified list cannot be amended after the close of rolls. Common corrections that may be made to the notebook roll include additions and omissions of an elector from the certified list and other data entry errors at the point of enrolment or update. Notebook roll additions include new citizens after close of rolls and notebook deletions include deaths between close of rolls and voting day
<b>Ordinary vote</b>	A vote cast on election/voting day at a polling place within the electoral division for which a voter is enrolled.
<b>Overseas elector</b>	An elector who is going overseas for three years or less can apply to be an overseas elector within 3 months before leaving Australia or within 1 year after the day on which they ceased to reside in Australia.
<b>Postal vote</b>	A vote cast by post because the voter cannot attend a polling place in their state or territory.
<b>Pre-poll vote</b>	A vote cast at an early voting centre or an AEC divisional office before election/voting day.
<b>Provisional vote</b>	A vote cast when a voter's name cannot be found on the certified list, the voter's name is already marked off the certified list as having voted, or the voter is registered as a silent elector.
<b>Referendum</b>	The Australian Constitution can only be altered with the approval of a national majority of electors in States and Territories and a majority of electors in a majority of States.
<b>Roll</b>	The list of voters eligible to vote at an election or referendum.
<b>Scrutineer</b>	A person appointed by a candidate to observe the voting and counting of the votes.
<b>Scrutiny</b>	The counting of votes which leads to the election or referendum result.

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<b>Silent Elector</b>	An elector who has applied to have their address not appear on the electoral roll because their safety or that of their family is at risk.
<b>Tally Room</b>	An AEC website that displays official election or referendum results.
<b>Turnout</b>	The number of enrolled electors who voted in an election or referendum.
<b>Writ</b>	A document commanding an electoral officer to hold an election. The writ contains dates for the close of rolls, the close of nominations, the election day and the latest day for the return of the writ.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – AEC IEPP partnerships

Count	State	AEC Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) Partnerships active during the 2023 Referendum
1	National	YLab (The Foundation for Young Australians)
2	ACT	Soward Management Australia
3	NSW	Albury-Wodonga LALC (Albury & District Local Aboriginal Land Council)
4	NSW	Armajun Aboriginal Health Service Armidale
5	NSW	Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council
6	NSW	Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Land Council
7	NSW	Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council (GLALC)
8	NSW	Gawura Aboriginal Corporation
9	NSW	Grafton Ngerrie Local Aboriginal Land Council (GNLALC)
10	NSW	Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Regional Health and Community Services (KACRHC)
11	NSW	National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE)
12	NSW	Newcastle University
13	NSW	Strong Spirits Aboriginal Services
14	NSW	Thunghutti Local Aboriginal Land Council
15	NSW	Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation
16	NSW	Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council (WBACC)
17	NT	Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS) <i>*Partnered with AEC but partnership work was ceased prior to close of rolls</i>
18	NT	Atyenhenge Atherre Aboriginal Corporation (AAAC)

<b>Count</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>AEC Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) Partnerships active during the 2023 Referendum</b>
19	NT	Cross-Cultural Consultants International
20	NT	Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA)
21	NT	Ngurratjuta Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation (NPNAC)
22	NT	NPY Women's Council <i>*Partnered with AEC but partnership work was ceased prior to close of rolls</i>
23	NT	Vernon Patullo (Sole Trader)
24	QLD	54 Reasons (Morrington Island)
25	QLD	Aurukun Shire Council
26	QLD	Brisbane Broncos Rugby League Club
27	QLD	Bynoe Community Advancement Cooperative
28	QLD	Community Gro Inc. <i>*entered into partnership post-referendum</i>
29	QLD	Darumbal Enterprises - Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body (DPAC RNTBC)
30	QLD	Gailes Community House
31	QLD	Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
32	QLD	Kingston East Neighborhood Group Inc (KENG)
33	QLD	Mindle Bygul Aboriginal Corporation
34	QLD	Mulungu Aboriginal Corporation Primary Health Service
35	QLD	My Pathway - Doomadgee
36	QLD	My Pathway (Cooktown, Hope Vale, Laura, Wujal Wujal, Diwan)
37	QLD	My Pathway/Kuku'Nathi (Napranum & Mapoon)
38	QLD	North Queensland Cowboys Rugby League Club
39	QLD	Rainbow Gateway (Palm Island)
40	QLD	RISE Ventures Kowanyama & Pormpuraaw

<b>Count</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>AEC Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) Partnerships active during the 2023 Referendum</b>
41	QLD	Seisia Community Torres Strait Islander Corporation
42	QLD	Yoonthalla Services Woorabinda (Woorabinda Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Health)
43	SA	Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM)
44	SA	Adelaide Day Centre for Homeless Persons Inc
45	SA	Iwiri Aboriginal Corporation
46	SA	Ngarrindjeri Ruwe - Empowered Communities
47	SA	TAFE SA (APY Lands)
48	SA	Tauondi Aboriginal Corporation
49	SA	Tjindu Foundation
50	SA	Umeewarra Aboriginal Media Association
51	TAS	Brumby Hill Aboriginal Corporation
52	TAS	Elders Council of Tasmania Aboriginal Corporation
53	TAS	Karadi Aboriginal Corporation
54	TAS	No 34 Aboriginal Health Service
55	VIC	Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation
56	VIC	Koling Wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation
57	VIC	Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation (MVAC)
58	VIC	Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation
59	VIC	Sunbury Aboriginal Corporation
60	WA	Bloodwood Tree Association Incorporated
61	WA	Bundiyyarra Aboriginal Community Corporation
62	WA	Garnduwa Amboorny Wirnan Aboriginal Corporation

<b>Count</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>AEC Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) Partnerships active during the 2023 Referendum</b>
63	WA	Glass Jar Australia Limited
64	WA	Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre Aboriginal Corporation (GALCAC)
65	WA	IBN Corporation Pty Ltd ATF IBN Charitable Foundation
66	WA	Jungarni Jutiya Indigenous Corporation
67	WA	Kimberley Jiyigas (Birds)
68	WA	Kullari Regional Communities Indigenous Corporation (KRCIC)
69	WA	Marra Worra Worra
70	WA	Midwest Employment and Economic Development Aboriginal Corporation (MEEDAC)
71	WA	Netball WA Incorporated
72	WA	Ngarliyarndu Bindirri Aboriginal Corporation (NBAC)
73	WA	Waalitj Foundation Limited

<b>Count</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Indigenous Engagement Panel providers – note these providers entered into a Deed of Standing Offer but did not undertake work during the Referendum</b>
74	NSW	AJA Solutions
75	NSW	Australian School of Entrepreneurship (The Youth Agency)
76	NSW	Cox Inall Ridgeway
77	NSW	Ngae Wah Gula (Origin Communications)
78	NSW	Orange Aboriginal Medical Services
79	NT	Central Desert Regional Council (CDRC)
80	SA	St John's Youth Services Incorporated

<b>Count</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>AEC Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) Partnerships <i>inactive</i> during the 2023 Referendum</b>
81	National	Ninti One (K Martin Consulting)
82	National	Pricewaterhouse Coopers Indigenous Consulting
83	NSW	Dubbo Local Aboriginal Land Council (DLALC)
84	NSW	NSW ALC
85	NSW	Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Services
86	NSW	UNSW
87	NSW	Woolyungah Indigenous Centre - Woolsongong Uni
88	NSW	Yarpa
89	NT	Anglicare NT
90	NT	Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation
91	NT	Gwalwa Daraniki Association Incorporated
92	NT	Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation
93	NT	Purple House (Top End)
94	NT	Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation
95	QLD	Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good (DIYDG)
96	QLD	Gur A Baradharaw Kod Sea and Land Council Torres Strait Islander Corporation
97	SA	Neporendi Aboriginal Forum Inc
98	SA	SA Native Title Services (SANTS)
99	VIC	Clothing the Gaps
100	VIC	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co Op Limited (VACCA)
101	VIC	Youth Affairs Council Victoria Inc (YACVic)
102	WA	Youth Affairs Council Western Australia (YACWA)

## Appendix B – Performance against the Service Plan

	Measure	Status
<b>Standard 1: Voters receive timely and accurate information</b>	<p>The AEC will provide timely and accurate information using appropriate technology and channels.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The AEC actively used social media, broadcast media and business led scripts in the Contact Centre to rapidly and consistently provide timely and achieve information to the public.</p>
	<p>Information published on the AEC website about the location and accessibility of voting centres (early voting centres and polling places) will be accurate.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The AEC actively provided and updated information on the website in relation to voting centres as early as this information became confirmed and available. This included early voting centres, overseas voting, postal voting, mobile voting, telephone voting, voting on the day, interstate voting and facilities for people with a disability.</p>
	<p>Preliminary results will be published as soon as they are available.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The AEC’s Tally Room website displayed progressive results throughout referendum scrutines.</p>
	<p>An official guide and a Yes/No case pamphlet for the referendum will be delivered to households across Australia.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The referendum pamphlet was progressively sent to all Australian household from mid-August 2023. The pamphlet was translated into 35 CALD languages, 13 First Nations languages and accessible formats such as large print and audio files.</p>
	<p>During the referendum period, the AEC’s national telephone number, 13 23 26, will operate daily from 9am to 5pm AEST.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>Lines were always open 9am to 5pm (local time) during the referendum period, with these hours increasing to 8am to 8pm (local time) between the issue of the writ and voting day and then 7am to 9pm (local time) on voting day.</p>
	<p>The AEC’s online enquiry form, which is always available, will be monitored and any enquiries received via this form will be answered in an efficient and accurate manner.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The online form was constantly monitored during the operational hours of the contact centre.</p>

	Measure	Status
<b>Standard 2: The AEC delivers a high-quality service</b>	<p>Applications for enrolment received by the close of roll deadline will be processed in time for the referendum.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>All applications and changes to enrolment that were received before the deadline (8pm, local time), Monday 18 September, were processed by the AEC.</p>
	<p>Early voting centres will operate for the referendum and the details of these locations and voter eligibility will be available on the AEC website.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The AEC actively provided and updated information on the website in relation to voting centres as early as this information became confirmed and available.</p>
	<p>Alternatively, voters who are entitled to an early vote can apply for a postal vote on the AEC website or on a paper application available at AEC offices. Postal vote applications must be received by the AEC before 6pm Wednesday 11 October.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>Postal vote applications opened on the Issue of the Writ and closed as required on the Wednesday before voting day. The AEC sent out over 2 million postal voting packs.</p>
	<p>The electoral roll for the referendum will close at 8pm Monday 18 September.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The electoral roll was closed at 8pm (local time) on 18 September 2023, at a record high of over 17.5 million eligible voters.</p>
	<p>Voting locations (including early voting centres and polling places) will open in accordance with advertised dates and times.</p>	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>Unless due to emergency or exceptional circumstances, all voting locations were operational in accordance with the advertised dates and times.</p>
	<p>AEC staff will be courteous and professional in all their dealings with the public.</p>	<p><b>Largely achieved</b></p> <p>The AEC received a very limited number of complaints about the behaviour of AEC staff over the course of the event. Every complaint about behaviour was brought to the attention of the relevant division and investigated, with no significant findings or concerns identified.</p> <p>Through the first level call centre, interactions between electors and staff were generally polite and courteous in nature.</p>

	Polling place accessibility ratings will be made available on the AEC website.	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>Details include accessibility ratings were published on the AEC website.</p>
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	Measure	Status
<p><b>Standard 3: Votes are counted in accordance with the Electoral Act and Referendum Act and the public and stakeholders have confidence in the result</b></p>	After the close of polls, up-to-date count information will be progressively published on the AEC website.	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The AEC’s Tally Room website displayed progressive results throughout referendum scrutines.</p>
	Ballot papers (both used and unused) will be accounted for using established processes.	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>Ballot paper handling and security principles were adhered to throughout the event including storage, movement and reconciliation procedures.</p>
	Appointed scrutineers observe electoral processes, including counting of votes, to ensure transparency and integrity in the conduct of the referendum.	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The AEC updated the Scrutineers Handbook for the 2023 referendum, to outline the roles and responsibilities of both scrutineers and the AEC.</p> <p>Further, the AEC set up a dedicated scrutineer’s portal and telephone hotline to support scrutineers in undertaking their role.</p>
	The writ for the referendum will be returned in accordance with the relevant legislation.	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>The writ was returned on 6 November 2023.</p>
	The AEC’s conduct of the referendum will be upheld in the event of any challenges to results taken to the High Court.	<p><b>Achieved</b></p> <p>No petitions were filed in the High Court.</p>
	All instances of apparent multiple voting will be reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes.	<p><b>On track</b></p>
	All instances of apparent non-voting will be reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC	<p><b>On track</b></p>

	policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes.	
	Complaints will be managed in accordance with the AEC's Complaints Management Policy.	<b>Achieved</b> The AEC actioned over 4,500 complaints during the referendum event, all in line with the Complaints Management Policy.

	Measure	Status
<b>Standard 5: Referendum processes are informed by health advice</b>	The referendum will be delivered in accordance with COVID-19 measures as guided by relevant health advice.	<b>Achieved</b> Despite the decreasing requirements, the AEC maintained strict hygiene and sanitation procedures at voting centres.  The AEC Service Plan detailed the key modifications to AEC processes that were implemented to support COVID-19 safety. These were in line with the current external environment and in accordance with current advice from relevant health authorities.  All instances of identified COVID-19 cases were handled in line with the updated COVID-19 Management Handbook for the 2023 referendum.