

July 2025

Referendum Compliance Review Report

Ian Darling AO

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Purpose of this report

The referendum disclosure scheme is established under Part VIIIA of the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* (Referendum Act).

Ian Darling AO lodged a referendum individual donor disclosure return.

Pursuant to s 109N(2) of the Referendum Act this report provides Ian Darling AO (the donor) with the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) assessment of the level of compliance of the 2023 referendum donor disclosure return lodged by the donor with disclosure obligations under section 109G of the Referendum Act.

Disclosure obligations

A person or organisation (relevant person) must provide a disclosure return if the person or organisation made one or more donations totalling more than \$15,200 to a referendum entity during the referendum expenditure period and the donor intends for the donation to be used for the dominant purpose of incurring referendum expenditure or creating or communicating referendum matter.

Subsection 109G of the Referendum Act requires donors to furnish a return within 15 weeks after the end of the referendum expenditure period.

The return must disclose:

- details of donations made to a referendum entity totalling more than the disclosure threshold between 11 March 2023 and 14 October 2023 (referendum expenditure period).

For the 2023 referendum:

- the disclosure threshold was for sums in excess of \$15,200
- the referendum expenditure period is from 11 March 2023 to 14 October 2023.

The Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act is available in full [here](#).

Conduct of the review

A delegate of the Electoral Commissioner has authority under s 109N(2) to require the production of information and documents for the purpose of assessing compliance with the disclosure obligations required of referendum donors under Part VIIIA of the Referendum Act.

Subsection 109N(2) of the Referendum Act permits the Electoral Commissioner to require the person to give to the Commissioner, within the period and in the manner and form specified in the notice any such information or documents for the purposes of considering whether the disclosure obligations under the Referendum Act have been complied with.

As part of this process, a delegate of the Electoral Commissioner of the AEC served a notice on the donor under s 109N(2) requiring the donor to provide their financial records and other documents relevant to the 2023 referendum.

Scope of the review

The records which were requested by the AEC from the donor were limited to those which enabled the AEC to assess the following aspects of compliance with their disclosure obligations under Part VIIIA of the Referendum Act:

- the timeliness of lodgement of the annual disclosure return
- the completeness and accuracy of the following information disclosed in the donor's referendum disclosure return for the 2023 referendum:
 - details of donations made to a referendum entity totalling more than \$15,200.

The AEC did not examine other aspects of the financial operations of the donor such as the existence or effectiveness of internal controls.

Stakeholder engagement

The AEC's general practice is to communicate with the relevant person by phone, email and/or face to face meetings to cover the following topics:

- financial reports and documentation available from the donor's accounting system
- compliance issues arising from the AEC review of the financial reports and documentation provided by the donor
- required and suggested amendments to the referendum disclosure return which arise from the compliance review; and
- potential enhancements in the donor understanding of disclosure obligations and accounting processes to improve future compliance.

During the review the donor provided documentation to the AEC as requested and within set timeframes.

A draft compliance review report was issued by a delegate of the Electoral Commissioner on 18 June 2025. The donor was provided with an opportunity to comment on the draft report by 25 June 2025. The donor did not provide any comments.

Review outcomes

1. Timely lodgement

Subsection 109G(2) of the Referendum Act requires the referendum donor to lodge a disclosure return with the AEC within 15 weeks after the end of the referendum expenditure period. As lodgement occurred on 8 February 2024 which is after the due date of 29 January 2024, the return did not comply with the requirement under ss 109G(2) to lodge a return for the donor within 15 weeks after the end of the referendum expenditure period.

2. Accuracy in reporting

After examining the documents provided by the donor for the review, a delegate of the Electoral Commissioner of the AEC identified no issues relating to compliance with disclosure obligations under s 109G of the Referendum Act.

Conclusion

A delegate of the Electoral Commissioner for the purposes of s 109N(2) of the Referendum Act has assessed the 2023 referendum disclosure return for Ian Darling AO lodged with the AEC on 8 February 2024 did not comply with the requirement under s 109G of the Referendum Act to lodge a return for the referendum donor within 15 weeks after the voting day for the referendum.

A delegate of the Electoral Commissioner has assessed that the 2023 referendum disclosure return accurately includes the information required to be disclosed under the provisions of s 109G of the Referendum Act.

Joanne Reid
Assistant Commissioner
Australian Electoral Commission

9 July 2025