# Central Senate Scrutiny (CSS)
## Frequently Asked Questions

1. How will Senate ballot papers be counted?
2. When will results be available for the Senate?
3. Where will the scrutiny occur?
4. Why does the AEC scan Senate ballot papers?
5. What does the scanner capture?
6. What happens to the ballot paper after scanning?
7. After scanning, can the original ballot paper be retrieved?
8. How has the AEC developed and improved the technology?
9. How are informal ballot papers treated?
10. How will scrutineers know where to go and what's required?
11. What is the role of scrutineers at the CSS?
12. Will scrutineers be able to challenge formality?
13. Who rules on challenges on ballot papers?
14. What measures are in place to ensure the security and integrity of ballot papers?
15. What is the security at the CSS site?
16. How can the AEC ensure the integrity of the process?

## 1. How will Senate ballot papers be counted?

All Senate ballot papers sent to CSS are initially scanned and the preferences captured and visually verified by a human operator. Preferences which have been marked on the Senate ballot papers are then entered into the count system.

Ballot papers which are informal, nonstandard or have unusual markings, are visually checked by two human operators to determine the preferences and formality. Scrutineers are able to observe this entire process and can object to the formality of a ballot paper. The preferences captured are then transferred into the count system.

This occurs progressively over several weeks as the ballot papers are processed through the semiautomated data capture process at the CSS. Once all the ballot papers have been scrutinised and the quota determined, the distribution of preferences is conducted to determine the final results, which are published to the Tally Room on the AEC website.

## 2. When will results be available for the Senate?

First preference counts will be available after 6pm on election day on the Tally Room on the AEC website. This is based on the first count of ordinary Senate ballot papers at all polling places.

Final results for the Senate will not be available for up to five weeks. The Senate count always takes longer to complete than the House of Representative count due to the size and nature of the task – more than 15 million Senate ballot papers must be scanned and entered into the system.

After the initial count at polling places, ballot papers are then dispatched to the divisional out-posted centres where they are reconciled and counted again. Once this process is complete, Senate ballot papers are dispatched to the Central Senate Scrutiny (CSS) centre in the capital city of each state and territory for scrutiny using the semiautomated process. When all ballot papers in the scrutiny

have been scanned and verified, the data is loaded into the count system and the Australian Electoral Officer (AEO) will run the distribution of preferences to enable a result to be declared.

## 3. Where will the scrutiny occur?

The scrutiny of Senate ballot papers takes place at the Central Senate Scrutiny (CSS) site. There is one dedicated CSS site at a Fujifilm premises in each state and territory capital city.

## 4. Why does the AEC scan Senate ballot papers?

The semiautomated process used to conduct the Senate count significantly reduces the human effort, time and cost of capturing voter preferences.

Under this process, Senate ballot papers are scanned using optical character recognition technology to capture preferences. Once captured, these preferences are then verified by a human operator.

At the 2022 election, over 15.5 million ballot papers were processed at the Senate Scrutiny Centres. It is anticipated that this number will rise progressively at future elections due to the natural increase in enrolment due to population growth.

## 5. What does the scanner capture?

As each ballot paper batch is run through the scanner, the scanner captures and stores a bi-tonal image that is used by the optical character recognition technology to capture the preferences. This is then verified by at least one human operator.

## 6. What happens to the ballot paper after scanning?

After each batch is passed through the scanner, the ballot papers are reconciled to ensure the number of ballot papers scanned matches the number of ballot papers counted in the batch. The ballot papers are then loaded back into their original Ballot Paper Transport Container (BPTC) sealed (with appropriate records updated) and placed into secure storage.

## 7. After scanning, can the original ballot paper be retrieved?

Yes. A physical ballot paper can be retrieved, if required, during the verification process.

## 8. How has the AEC developed and improved the technology?

The semiautomated Senate count solution has been developed by the AEC in partnership with Fujifilm. Fujifilm has over 30 years' experience providing secure scanning and data capture solutions to government and corporate clients.

Enhancements to the processes have been implemented to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and security of the Senate count, building on the successful Senate elections since the reforms to Senate voting in 2016. The changes will not affect the way votes are cast.

## 9. How are informal ballot papers treated?

After a ballot paper has been scanned, a marked ballot paper identified as potentially informal is sent to the validation queue for checking by an additional human operator.

## 10. How will scrutineers know where to go and what's required?

Before election day, the AEC will provide all parties and candidates with Senate scrutiny appointment forms which are required to be filled out and returned to the AEC detailing nominated representatives for the scrutiny. The AEC will provide all scrutineers with information detailing the site of the CSS, registration, induction, parking, public transport, rules and guidelines for scrutineers via the AEC website. Information for scrutineers can be found on the AEC website.

## 11. What is the role of scrutineers at the CSS?

The Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (the Electoral Act) prescribes that all candidates have the opportunity to have their representatives attend the CSS to observe the scrutiny of ballot papers. Scrutineers carry out an important role in ensuring integrity in the conduct of elections.

## 12. Will scrutineers be able to challenge formality?

Yes. The formality of ballot papers is determined at the CSS and scrutineers may challenge the formality decision of any ballot paper. The AEC has provided large monitors at workstations in order to give scrutineers greater visibility of ballot papers.

## 13. Who rules on challenges on ballot papers?

The Australian Electoral Officer (AEO) for the state or territory is the last point of escalation for all disputes, challenges and uncertainty for ballot paper formality. All decisions made by the AEO are final. A Central Senate Scrutiny manager (an AEC officer) oversees the daily operations, monitors and supports operators in the adjudication zone.

## 14. What measures are in place to ensure the security and integrity of ballot papers?

The AEC's operations and procedures, including the Ballot Paper Principles and Ballot Paper Handling Policy, mean that at all times, all ballot papers are tracked, secure and accounted for.

- Ballot papers are stored and transported in ballot paper transport containers (BPTC) which are clearly labelled and closed with two unique seals to prevent tampering.

- BPTCs are tracked during transport and are always under the supervision of an authorised staff member or contractor.

- At the CSS, ballot papers are stored and handled in designated ballot paper secure zones

- When ballot papers are scanned a digital signature is applied to the data that allows the AEC to detect if the files have been tampered with.

- A full blind entry of preference data is undertaken by a second human operator for all ballot papers.

- Any ballot paper with unknown preferences or unusual markings is referred to a separate human operator for verification of the marks on the ballot paper.

- If a discrepancy occurs during verification, the matter is sent to the AEC for adjudication and resolution.

- Scrutineers may view the scanning, verification and adjudication processes. If they wish, they may raise challenges for adjudication by the Australian Electoral Officer (AEO).

- After the election, ballot papers are stored at secure records management facilities and can only be destroyed at the authorisation of the Electoral Commissioner in accordance with the relevant provisions of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

- The AEC monitors changing threat profiles and continues to implement increased digital security measures that have been assessed for effectiveness.

Information about CSS Security and Integrity can be found on the AEC website.

## 15. What is the security at the CSS site?

Physical security at all CSS sites includes 24 hour security guards and patrols, CCTV monitoring, and smart card access.

All staff and visitors must provide a valid ID and sign in before they are permitted to enter the CSS building; and visitors, including scrutineers, will be escorted at all times and required to keep to designated scrutiny areas. The AEC Election Personnel Identification Policy applies at CSS sites and outlines mandatory protocols on visual identification of AEC staff, visitors and scrutineers.

Information about CSS Security and Integrity can be found on the AEC website.

## 16. How can the AEC ensure the integrity of the process?

Ensuring the integrity of the electoral process is integral to the AEC's purpose to maintain an impartial and independent electoral system. To ensure the integrity of the count, the Central Senate systems and count process has been externally reviewed and the count program shown (by an independent provider) to correctly implement the legislation. The system has been assessed by independent, accredited Australian Information Security Registered Assessors Program (IRAP) and the systems and networks underwent independent penetration tests.

The AEC also performs ballot paper sampling assurance, that is separate to the count process. Scrutineers are able to observe this process, however raising challenges is not permitted.

As prescribed in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, scrutineers may oversee the count process and may raise challenges for adjudication by the AEC.

Information about CSS Security and Integrity can be found on the AEC website.