

# Senate Ballot Paper Security and Integrity

## Background

The security and integrity of all ballot papers is paramount. The AEC has new processes that govern ballot paper handling, from printing to authorised destruction.

All activities involving ballot papers – printing, transport, issue, voting, sorting, counting, movement and storage – are designed to safeguard the security and integrity of the ballot paper. The AEC's operations and procedures, including the Ballot Paper Handling Policy, mean that at all times, all ballot papers are tracked, secure and accounted for.

### Ballot Paper Principles:

1. All ballot papers remain 'live' from printing through to statutorily authorised destruction.
2. The security, integrity and accountability of ballot papers must be preserved at all times – including transit and storage by the AEC, contractors, or other third parties.

## Senate ballot paper security and tracking

After 6pm on election day, all polling places complete a first preference count of Senate ballot papers. The ballot papers are then packed into ballot paper transport containers (BPTC), sealed and taken to the divisional outposted centre. Here a further first preference count is undertaken and then the ballot papers are despatched to Central Senate Scrutiny (CSS), again in BPTCs.

Every BPTC is sealed with two unique seals used to detect if it has been tampered with. Each time a BPTC is opened or sealed (including at the CSS), an entry is made in the "record of security seals for ballot paper transport containers" form.

At the CSS, the AEC conducts the Senate count using a semi-automated process, scanning Senate ballot papers and using optical character recognition technology to capture preferences, which are then verified by a human operator.

After scanning, the semi-automated process generates metadata for each scanned ballot paper. Each ballot paper image's metadata has:

1. a unique identifier
2. the state that the ballot paper is for
3. the division that the ballot paper is for

4. the polling place that issued the ballot paper or the Declaration Vote count in which the ballot paper was included
5. the number of the batch in which the ballot paper is located
6. the number of the transport container in which the ballot paper is located
7. the file system path of the image of the ballot paper
8. the above and/or below the line preferences recorded on the ballot paper
9. a flag to indicate that the ballot paper was official
10. the date and time the ballot paper was scanned
11. the username of the operator that scanned the ballot paper.

A digital signature is applied to the metadata that allows the AEC to detect if the file has been tampered with between generation and loading into the count system.

## Security

Security at all CSS sites includes 24 hour security guards and patrols, CCTV coverage and a visitor reception area. All staff and visitors are required to identify themselves and sign in before they are permitted to enter the CSS building. Visitors, including scrutineers, will be escorted at all times and required to keep to designated scrutiny areas.

The AEC Election Personnel Identification Policy also applies at CSS sites; this policy outlines mandatory protocols on visual identification of AEC staff, visitors and scrutineers.

## Ballot paper secure storage and work zones

Ballot paper secure zones are designated areas for handling or storing ballot papers.

Any time ballot papers are not in a ballot paper secure zone they must be under the supervision of an authorised person.

Scrutineers are permitted in ballot paper secure work zones.

Scrutineers are not allowed to handle ballot papers.

## Labelling

When not being processed, ballot papers are securely packaged in ballot paper transport containers with tamper-evident seals and clear labelling.

## Tracking

Ballot paper transport containers are tracked via tracking forms for each and every transfer of custody. Tracking forms are completed at the time the transfer of custody takes place. At the CSS, ballot paper transport containers are tracked electronically.

## Transport

Transport of ballot papers is by at least two AEC staff or an approved courier authorised to undertake transport, with at least one staff member remaining with the ballot papers at all times.

## Long-term Storage

Long-term storage of ballot papers is at third party secure records management facilities contracted by the AEC.

## Destroying Ballot Papers

Ballot papers are destroyed at the authorisation of the Electoral Commissioner only in accordance with the relevant provisions of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.