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Information Publication Scheme: Agency Plan for the Australian Electoral Commission

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is an agency subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act), including the requirements of the FOI Act relating to the Information Publication Scheme (IPS). The AEC has prepared this agency plan in accordance with subsection 8(1) of the FOI Act.
- 1.2 The plan is subject to review in the light of the AEC's experience in implementing the IPS and public comments on the plan. The public is encouraged and welcomed to comment on this plan. Contact details are listed below.
- 1.3 The AEC's primary role is to provide a range of electoral services to the people of Australia, as set out in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* and other relevant legislation. Our services include:
 - preparing for, conducting and reviewing federal elections and referendums;
 - preparing for and conducting industrial elections, protected action ballots and fee for service elections;
 - managing the electoral roll;
 - educating and informing the community;
 - providing research, advice and assistance on electoral matters;
 - administering the election funding scheme and financial disclosure requirements; and supporting electoral redistributions.
- 1.4 This plan describes how the AEC proposes to implement and administer the IPS in respect of its own information holdings, addressing:
 - (a) establishment and administration of the AEC's IPS entry (the AEC's implementation of the IPS);
 - (b) IPS information architecture for the AEC;
 - (c) information required to be published by the AEC under the IPS;
 - (d) other information to be published by the AEC (optional information);
 - (e) accessibility of information to be published by the AEC, and
 - (f) planned reviews, including the compliance review to be conducted under the FOI Act by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.
- 1.5 The AEC aims to foster an internal culture in which opportunities for publication of our information holdings are proactively identified, assessed and where appropriate implemented, as part of an implementation of the IPS that not only efficiently meets the requirements of the FOI Act but also enhances performance of our functions and facilitates appropriate public engagement.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This plan is prepared in accordance with subsection 8(1) of the FOI Act, which requires each Commonwealth agency subject to the Act to prepare a plan showing how the agency will comply with the requirements of Part II of the FOI Act, which establishes the IPS. The plan is also intended to support the AEC in delivering good practice implementation of its agency responsibilities in relation to the IPS, as set out below.
- 2.2 Agencies are required to facilitate and promote public access to information promptly and at the lowest reasonable cost. Agencies are also required to keep the information published accurate, up-to-date and complete.

3. Objectives

- 3.1 The AEC's objective in preparing this plan is to outline mechanisms and procedures which will be implemented to:
 - (a) manage and make available information to be published by the AEC under the IPS
 - (b) identify and publish all information required to be published by the AEC (s 8(2) of the FOI Act)
 - (c) proactively identify and publish appropriate optional information to be published by the AEC (s 8(4) of the FOI Act)
 - (d) ensure and confirm on a regular basis that information published by the AEC under the IPS is accurate, up-to-date and complete (s 8B of the FOI Act)
 - (e) ensure that information published by the AEC under the IPS is, to the extent practicable, easily discoverable, understandable, machine-readable, re-useable and transformable
 - (f) ensure satisfactory conformance by the AEC with the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Version 2) (WCAG 2.0)*
 - (g) develop procedures to evaluate the AEC's implementation of the IPS, and
 - (h) adopt best practice initiatives in implementing and administering the AEC's contribution to the IPS.

4. Establishing and administering the AEC's IPS entry

- 4.1 The Chief Legal Officer is the senior officer responsible for implementation of FOI reforms within the AEC, including the AEC's implementation of the IPS.
- 4.2 The AEC has prepared for its implementation of the IPS by:
 - (a) considering the kinds of information required to be published by the AEC and able to be published, and information already made available to the public through other channels, and
 - (b) reviewing information already published on the AEC website (www.aec.gov.au), including as to its accessibility.
- 4.3 The AEC recognises that:
 - (a) AEC content managers will need to ensure that published information is accurate, up-to-date and complete; and
 - (b) ongoing efforts will be required to improve the accessibility of information published by the AEC, particularly current and important information. (Some legacy web content may be archived or decommissioned rather than re-published in more accessible formats.)
- 4.4 The AEC aims to make IPS documents as easily discoverable and machine-readable as possible, and where documents are prepared primarily for the purpose of publication as part of the IPS we aim to make them as understandable as possible.
- 4.5 There is no charge for accessing or downloading information that has been published on the IPS. If information is requested in paper format, or another format, it may be necessary to impose a charge. If charges are necessary for any IPS document which it is impracticable to publish online, the charge will be:
 - (a) at the lowest reasonable cost
 - (b) to reimburse specific reproduction costs or other specific incidental costs (s 8D(4)).
- 4.6 The AEC will publish on its website a list of any IPS documents that are impracticable to publish online. The website will identify points of contact to arrange access to such documents.

5. IPS information architecture for the AEC

- 5.1 The initial point of entry for online public access to AEC information is the AEC home page (www.aec.gov.au) which hosts AEC's IPS webpage. This webpage

comprises specific documents required to be published, a comprehensive site index providing access to further information, and links to information on other agency websites as appropriate.

- 5.2 The IPS information holdings on the AEC website will be published under the following headings:
- (a) Agency plan (s 8(2)(a) of the FOI Act)
 - (b) Who we are (ss 8(2)(b) and 8(2)(d) of the FOI Act)
 - (c) What we do (ss 8(2)(c) and 8(2)(j) of the FOI Act)
 - (d) Our reports and responses to Parliament (ss 8(2)(e) and 8(2)(h) of the FOI Act)
 - (e) Routinely requested information and disclosure log (ss 8(2)(g) and 11C of the FOI Act)
 - (f) Consultation arrangements (s 8(2)(f) of the FOI Act)
 - (g) Our priorities (s 8(4) of the FOI Act)
 - (h) Our finances (s 8(4) of the FOI Act)
 - (i) Our lists (s 8(4) of the FOI Act), and
 - (j) Contact us (s 8(2)(i) of the FOI Act).
- 5.3 To promote the ease of discovery, comprehensibility and machine-readability of the AEC's IPS information holdings, the AEC will:
- (a) Use the IPS and FOI icons as links to the IPS and FOI information in the footer of the AEC website;
 - (b) wherever possible, provide online content in a format that can be searched, copied and transformed;
 - (c) develop an effective search engine and appropriate information architecture for its website, to help individuals identify the locations of information published under ss 8(2) and 8(4) of the FOI Act and other information;
 - (d) continue to provide a search function for its website;
 - (e) maintain links to the AEC's website, through which this agency plan and the sitemap will be accessible, from the Government Online Directory, www.directory.gov.au,
 - (f) invite and respond to community feedback about whether the IPS information holdings (and individual IPS documents) are sufficiently easily discoverable, understandable and machine-readable.

- 5.4 The AEC will make its IPS documents available in the IPS section of the AEC website.
- 5.5 The AEC will, so far as appropriate, make its IPS information holdings available for reuse on open licensing terms. There may be documents in the possession of the AEC that are required to be published under the IPS where a third party has intellectual property rights. In these circumstances, members of the public may need to seek permission of a third party copyright owner in order to re-use the material.
- 5.6 Under existing policies, all online publication by the AEC is to take into account WCAG 2.0 requirements. As far as possible, information will be published in formats including HTML, PDF, CSV and RTF and printed information will be provided on reasonable request.

6. Information required to be published

- 6.1 The AEC will publish documents required to be published under the IPS (s 8(2) of the FOI Act), or links to the documents, in the IPS section of the AEC.
- 6.2 The AEC will publish these documents or links under the following headings.

Agency plan (ss 8(2)(a))

- 6.3 The IPS section will house a copy of this plan or its most up-to-date successor.

Who we are (ss 8(2)(b) and 8(2)(d) of the FOI Act)

- 6.4 The IPS section will include:

- (a) an organisation chart;
- (b) information about employment with the AEC including the latest AEC Employment Agreement; and
- (c) information about statutory appointments in the AEC.

For relevant statutory appointments, the AEC will publish:

- (i) the name of the person appointed;
- (ii) the length or term of appointment, the position to which the person is appointed (and particulars of the position); and
- (iii) the provision of the Act under which the person is appointed.

What we do (ss 8(2)(c) and 8(2)(j) of the FOI Act)

- 6.5 This will outline the functions and decision-making powers of the AEC. The AEC will also publish operational information held by the AEC used to perform the AEC's functions or exercise the AEC's powers in making decisions or

recommendations affecting members of the public, such as rules, guidelines, practices and precedents relating to such decisions and recommendations.

Our reports and responses to Parliament (ss 8(2)(e) and 8(2)(h) of the FOI Act)

- 6.6 This will include links to the full texts of the AEC's:
- (a) annual reports tabled in Parliament; and
 - (b) submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) established for the current Parliament.

Routinely requested information (ss 8(2)(g) and 11C of the FOI Act)

- 6.7 This will include information in documents to which the AEC routinely gives access in response to FOI requests.
- 6.8 The AEC will list these documents in its disclosure log published under s 11C of the FOI Act, which requires agencies to publish information contained in documents to which the agency has provided access under the FOI Act.

Consultation (s 8(2)(f) of the FOI Act)

- 6.9 Where the AEC undertakes public consultation on a specific policy proposal or a redistribution under Part IV of the CE Act, this section will include information about how and to whom a comment may be submitted by members of the public.
- 6.10 The AEC will also invite the public to make submissions/comments/objections on/to proposed electoral redistributions and arrange public meetings to better engage with the public in relation to redistributions. The initial invitation is given by notice published in the Commonwealth *Gazette*, at [Gazettes \(legislation.gov.au\)](http://www.gazettes.gov.au) and in the major State paper and regional papers (as appropriate) and on the AEC's website at www.aec.gov.au.

Contact us (s 8(2)(i) of the FOI Act)

- 6.11 The AEC will establish generic telephone numbers and email addresses for members of the public to use for contact about access to the AEC's information or documents under the FOI Act. These will not change with staff movements.

7. Other information

- 7.1 AEC will from time to time publish on the IPS section of its website select other information that it holds (in addition to the information published under s 8(2)), that is not subject to exemption, taking into account the objects of the FOI Act (s 8(4)). Optional information will be published under the following headings.

Our priorities

- 7.2 This may include corporate and strategic plans, assessments and reviews.

Our finances

- 7.3 This may include financial information relating to pay and grading structures, procurement procedures, tendering and contracts.

Our lists

- 7.4 This may include agency contracts, grants and appointments.

Our submissions

- 7.5 This may include submissions made by the AEC to Parliamentary committees (other than JSCEM) following the committee's consideration.

Our policies

- 7.6 This may include the AEC policies about:
- (a) Procurement;
 - (b) email and internet usage;
 - (c) harassment;
 - (d) maternity leave and
 - (e) workplace diversity.
- 7.7 In addition, in the IPS section the AEC may publish links to other publications not covered by these headings, such as electoral backgrounders, fact sheets, speeches or guidelines.

8. Accessibility under the IPS

- 8.1 Commonwealth agencies are required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 to ensure that information and services are accessible by people with disabilities.
- 8.2 Our website aims to meet the Australian Government's web accessibility requirements. These include the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) at level AA.
- 8.3 Many of the items currently published on the AEC's website, or that will be required to be published, are not currently available, and cannot readily be made available, in fully accessible formats. These include:
- (a) PDFs created from scanned documents.
 - (i) this is particularly relevant for material released under FOI, for example where a document to which access has been sought may only be available in hard copy, or where a document is released subject to redactions which have been prepared in hard copy format;

- (b) documents that are out-of-date but provided for historical reference;
- (c) maps, charts and tables; and
- (d) submissions to the AEC in response to invitations for comment issued as part of public consultation processes such as in relation to proposed redistributions.

8.4 Under the IPS, the AEC will endeavour to publish any new documents prepared for the purpose of publication under the IPS, or which the AEC has undertaken in this plan to publish, in fully accessible formats, either when they are first published, or as soon as practicable after they are first published.

9. IPS compliance review

- 9.1 The AEC will review its implementation of the IPS regularly and update its plan. We will ensure that online information, in all formats, is regularly reviewed for currency and accuracy. Outdated information will be replaced or archived.
- 9.2 The success of the AEC's implementation of the IPS will be gauged by reference to indicators including public feedback, numbers of requests to the AEC for general information and numbers of FOI request to the AEC for information available from the AEC's IPS information holdings.
- 9.3 The AEC will review the operation of the scheme in the AEC, in conjunction with the Information Commissioner, at least once every five years, with timing of those reviews to be determined in consultation with the Information Commissioner.

10. Contacting the AEC about our information and our IPS entry

10.1 Requests for information can be made to:

The Freedom of Information Contact Officer
Australian Electoral Commission
Locked Bag 4007

Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone: 13 23 26

Email foi@aec.gov.au.

10.2 Members of the public are invited to provide any comments on the accessibility of the AEC's IPS information holdings through the AEC website or to foi@aec.gov.au.

- 10.3 Other comments and queries on or in relation to AEC's IPS information holdings may also be made to foi@aec.gov.au as a default point of contact, in addition to any other points of contact provided in or in relation to particular documents, and public comments and queries will be referred to the appropriate line area of the AEC for timely response.