

February 2023

Aston by-election

Service Plan

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Foreword

The AEC is committed to providing the highest standard of electoral services for the Aston by-election. We are committed to continuous improvement, and we have taken lessons from our experiences conducting by-elections and the 2022 federal election during the COVID-19 pandemic which we can apply to the Aston by-election. This service plan outlines the key election services and standards that will underpin the AEC's delivery of the 2023 Aston by-election.

Electoral integrity remains at the core of our operations. We are committed to a high-quality, trustworthy, and transparent by-election. Procedures facilitating safe and secure ballot paper handling will be complemented by measures to ensure voters are able to have a positive experience casting their vote.

We will continue to have a range of COVID-19 safety measures for voters, AEC staff and other participants through the entire by-election process, including the management of election materials and at our counting centre. Some of the measures implemented at the federal election will be the same, such as employing a hygiene officer in every polling place, and some will be different. For example, the easing of restrictions has allowed us to deliver higher levels of mobile polling and our mobile polling service offering will return to pre-pandemic levels.

Should you have any comments on the Service Plan or the AEC's delivery on these commitments, I would ask you to take the time to let us know through our [online enquiry form](#) so we can consider your feedback as we continue to improve the delivery of our election services.

Tom Rogers

Electoral Commissioner

Overview

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is the independent statutory authority responsible for the conduct of federal by-elections.

A by-election must be held when a House of Representatives seat falls vacant; this may be for reasons such as the death, resignation, absence without leave, or other ineligibility of the sitting member.

On Thursday 9 February 2023, the sitting member for Aston announced his resignation in the federal Parliament. The Aston by-election is required as a result of this resignation.

On Monday 20 February the Speaker of the House of Representatives announced that the writ for the by-election would be issued on Monday 27 February 2023, and that the Aston by-election would be held on 1 April 2023.

Agency purpose

The AEC is the independent statutory authority responsible for the conduct of federal elections, referendums and by-elections. Our purpose is to maintain an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible voters through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services, and targeted education and public awareness programs.

In line with the Electoral Act, we do this by:

- conducting successful electoral events, including federal elections, by-elections and referendums, and industrial elections and ballots
- ensuring confidence in the Commonwealth Electoral Roll
- regulating political party registrations and financial disclosure
- supporting electoral redistributions
- undertaking public awareness activities.

Most Australians fulfil their enrolment and voting obligations; however, some groups face challenges in meeting these obligations. The AEC works hard across the electoral cycle to increase opportunities to engage and enhance access to elections for people experiencing challenges or low electoral participation. The AEC has identified these electors as priority groups for increasing electoral participation. These include:

- First Nations people
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- young people aged 16 to 24 years of age
- people with disability
- people experiencing homelessness
- prisoners.

It is important to note that an eligible elector may have characteristics of one or more of the priority groups. For these Australians, the reasons and challenges for participation are complex and may require a layering of engagement over time. More information on how we have designed elements of

our service offering to meet the needs of these electors during this by-election is outlined throughout this document.

AEC values

The AEC values and commitments are an essential component of our operating environment and frame how AEC staff work. The AEC's focus is on **electoral integrity** through the values of **quality**, **agility**, and **professionalism**.

COVID-19 safety measures for the by-election

This Service Plan details the key modifications to AEC processes that are being implemented to support COVID-19 safety. These are in line with the current external environment and in accordance with current advice from relevant health authorities.

By-election timetable

A number of essential steps are involved in conducting a by-election.

These steps, according to the Australian Constitution and the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act), begin with the issue of the writ (a document commanding an electoral official to hold an election) and end with the return of the writ after the votes have been counted and the results declared.

The Aston by-election will be conducted according to the following [timetable](#).

Activity	Date
By-election date announced	Monday 20 February
Postal vote applications open	Monday 20 February
Issue of the writ	Monday 27 February 6pm AEST
Close of rolls	8pm Monday 6 March
Close of candidate nominations	12pm Thursday 9 March
Declaration of candidate nominations	12pm Friday 10 March
Early voting commences	Monday 20 March
Last day for receipt of postal vote applications	6pm Wednesday 29 March
By-election day	Saturday 1 April
Last day for receipt of postal votes	Friday 14 April
Return of the writ (latest date)	On or before Wednesday 7 June

Election delivery

The AEC election delivery principles underpin delivery at the next by-election.



Integrity of the result

- safe custody and handling of ballot papers
- maintaining integrity of a person's lawful right to vote by providing a wide range of voting services nationally and internationally for all eligible Australians
- facilitating ballot paper formality
- all electoral processes undertaken in compliance with the Electoral Act
- all recent legislative changes implemented according to the requirements of the Electoral Act

Good customer service and positive customer experience

- provide an improved voter experience at the election
- voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information
- staff will be courteous and professional in all their dealings with the public and candidates

Efficient processes and procedures

- continue to build staff capability and provide an improved experience for AEC staff in delivering the election
- further integrate planning across all levels of the AEC
- maintain the ability to mobilise and deliver electoral events whenever they are called

Summary of AEC service standards

The following five election service standards will guide the AEC in delivering the Aston by-election.

Standard 1: Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information

Achieved by:

The AEC will provide timely and accurate information using appropriate technology and channels.

The [AEC website](#) serves as a central information hub providing candidate nomination forms (including the qualification checklist), the [Nominations Guide](#) and the [Candidates Handbook](#), which provides guidance on standing for election to the Australian Parliament.

Information published on the AEC website about the location and accessibility of voting centres (early voting centres and polling places) will be accurate.

Preliminary results will be published as soon as they are available.

During the early voting period, an official guide to the by-election will be delivered to households across the electoral Division of Aston.

During the election period, the AEC's 13 23 26 telephone number will provide a specific Aston by-election service which will operate daily from 9.00am to 5.00pm AEST.

For this by-election, information will be accessible to voters who speak a language other than English via the **telephone interpreter service**, which is available in more than 19 languages. The National Relay Service is also available for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment.

The AEC is committed to the provision of services through a range of channels. Should a member of the public be looking for information, wish to ask a question, provide feedback or make a complaint, they can do so online ([AEC website](#)), on the phone (13 23 26) or at any AEC office.

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.

Standard 2: The AEC delivers a high-quality service

Achieved by:

Applications for enrolment received by the close of roll deadline will be processed in time for the by-election.

Early voting centres will operate for the Division of Aston by-election and the details of these locations and voter eligibility will be available at www.aec.gov.au.

Alternatively, voters who are entitled to an early vote can apply for a postal vote at www.aec.gov.au or on a paper application available at AEC offices. Postal vote applications must be received by the AEC before 6pm Wednesday 29 March 2023.

The electoral roll for the Aston by-election will close at 8pm Monday 6 March 2023.

Voting locations (including early voting centres and polling places) will open in accordance with advertised dates and times.

AEC staff will be courteous and professional in all their dealings with the public and candidates.

Polling place accessibility ratings will be made available on the AEC website.

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

Achieved by:

After the close of polls, up-to-date count information will be progressively published on the AEC website.

Ballot papers (both used and unused) will be accounted for using established processes.

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

Achieved by:

The writs for the by-election will be returned in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The AEC's conduct of the by-election will be upheld in the event of any challenges to results taken to the Court of Disputed Returns.

All instances of apparent multiple voting will be reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes.

All instances of apparent non-voting will be reviewed and dealt with in accordance with AEC policy and procedures and within statutory timeframes.

Complaints will be managed in accordance with the [Complaints Management Policy](#).

Standard 5: Election processes are informed by health advice

Achieved by:

The election will be delivered in accordance with the COVID-19 measures as guided by relevant health advice.

Achieving the AEC service standards

1. Voters and candidates receive timely and accurate information

Communication

The AEC will support effective participation in the by-election by ensuring information provided to the voting public and candidates is timely, accurate, comprehensive, and easy to understand.

The AEC will communicate with eligible electors in the Division of Aston in order to provide information about the by-election and encourage participation. This will include some advertising, social media content and outreach to local community organisations. Up-to-date information will also be available on the [AEC website](#).

The AEC also has online practise voting tools. These have been developed to explain the easiest way to make sure a voter's vote will count in election events. They are interactive with easy-to-follow instructions on how to complete your ballot paper correctly. The tool is supported by easy-to-read guides in 40 languages other than English. These can be accessed at https://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/How_to_vote/practice/.

An official guide will be delivered to households across the electoral Division of Aston. The guide will provide information on where, how, and when to vote, what to do if you cannot get to a polling place

on by-election day, and how to complete your ballot paper correctly. The guide will be translated into key languages and made available on the AEC website.

During the election period, the AEC's national telephone number, 13 23 26, will operate. A telephone interpreter service is available in more than 19 languages, and the National Relay Service is also available for voters (or any other person) who may need assistance contacting the AEC.

The AEC is committed to the provision of services through a range of channels. Should a member of the public be looking for information, wish to ask a question, provide feedback, or make a complaint, they can do so online, on the phone, or at an AEC office. The AEC's [online enquiry form](#) will be monitored in real time and any enquiries received via this form will be answered in an efficient and accurate manner.

Taking nominations

Prospective candidates will be provided with a range of information and services. The [AEC website](#) serves as a central information hub, providing [candidate nomination forms](#) (including the qualification checklist), the [Nomination Guide for Candidates](#), and the [Candidates Handbook](#), which all provide guidance on standing for election to the Australian Parliament.

2. The AEC delivers a high-quality service

Enrolment services

The AEC aims to deliver a high-quality service which allows voters to ensure their enrolment is up to date and facilitates voting based on individual circumstances.

The electoral roll will close at 8pm, Monday 6 March. Voters are able to [enrol](#), [check their current electoral enrolment](#), [update their enrolment details](#), or [check the progress of their enrolment application](#) online. Enrolment applications are also available at any AEC office and on the [AEC website](#). A full list of AEC offices is available on the [AEC website](#). The preferred method of enrolment is online.

Early voting services

Voters who are entitled to cast an early vote can do so in person or by post. A person is entitled to an early vote if they meet the [eligibility requirements](#) listed on the AEC website.

Postal voting

Voters who are entitled to a postal vote can apply at www.aec.gov.au which is the preferred method of application or by using a paper application form available at AEC offices. Voters may also receive postal vote applications from candidates and political parties, which may be returned via the party or

directly to the AEC. Postal vote applications must be received by the AEC before 6pm on Wednesday 29 March.

Voting for residents of aged care facilities and hospital patients

The AEC is very conscious of the health and safety of voters, particularly those who are at higher risk of more serious illness with COVID-19.

Based on health advice, the AEC will be offering an increased mobile polling service compared to the 2022 federal election. Details regarding the locations that mobile polling teams will be visiting will be available at aec.gov.au. There will be no mobile polling in hospitals.

Postal voting will be available to voters who cannot be visited by a mobile polling team. In-person early voting and voting on by-election day is also available.

Voting for people who are blind or have low vision and Antarctic voters

Any voters who are blind or have low vision will be able to vote via the secure telephone voting service. This service is operated by the AEC and allows registered voters to cast a secret vote from any location, without attending an AEC office or polling place.

Voters working in Antarctica, or in transit to or from Antarctica on by-election day, are also eligible to register and vote using the secure telephone voting service as described above.

Overseas voting

Aston voters who are living, working or holidaying overseas can apply online for a postal vote at aec.gov.au.

It is requested that voters overseas both apply for a postal vote and return their ballot papers as soon as possible to ensure they receive and return their ballot papers within all legislated time limits. Ballot papers must be completed before 6pm on polling day and then be received by the AEC by 6pm on Friday 14 April.

Voting on polling day

On by-election day, Saturday 1 April, polling places across the Division of Aston will be open between 8am and 6pm local time. A full list of polling places will be available at aec.gov.au.

Sustainability

The AEC is conscious of our environmental impact and has adopted several initiatives to proactively reduce waste. All AEC cardboard materials have been redesigned to be lighter, stronger, and easier

to be recycled and reused. Traditional AEC branding and colouration has also been removed, further making the product more attractive to be retained and repurposed by polling places such as schools.

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

The AEC will ensure count processes produce a timely and accurate result and are managed in a transparent manner.

Counting the votes

The AEC will ensure count processes produce a timely and accurate result and are managed in a transparent manner.

The by-election results will be communicated to the public in a clear and timely way. The AEC's official results centre, the Tally Room on the AEC website, enables the public, candidates and scrutineers to follow vote counting on by-election night and progressive results until the final outcome is declared.

The Tally Room can be accessed on by-election night from 6pm and will be updated as results are entered into AEC systems.

Counts conducted in polling places on by-election night provide indicative results only. As counting continues in the weeks following by-election night, updates are made to the Tally Room as re-checked results and “fresh” results from declaration votes become available.

Candidates have the right to appoint scrutineers as personal representatives to observe both the voting and the counting of votes on their behalf at every polling place and counting centre. Scrutineers in an election must not wear or display any badge or emblem of a candidate or political party in a polling place on election day. Scrutineers must not actively seek to interfere with or attempt to influence a voter or communicate with any person in the polling place except so far as is necessary in the discharge of the scrutineer's functions. A [Scrutineers Handbook](#) is available to support the role of scrutineers.

4. The public and stakeholders have confidence that the electoral process is well managed

The Electoral Act prescribes how a federal election, including a by-election, is to be conducted. All policies, processes, and procedures implemented by the AEC during the by-election are designed to operate within the prescribed boundaries of the Electoral Act.

The AEC is committed to delivering processes that uphold electoral integrity, engender voter and stakeholder trust in the result, and ensure the security and sanctity of the ballot paper at all times.

The AEC has clear and established safeguards in place for the handling of ballot papers by AEC staff, temporary election staff and contractors, which will be demonstrated at the by-election. AEC staff, official visitors and scrutineers are required to wear badges and/or vests at polling places and counting centres so they can be easily identified.

The AEC is committed to treating complaints seriously, promptly, and in line with the AEC's [Complaints Management Policy](#). Complaints can be lodged using the AEC's [online enquiry form](#) or by calling the AEC's national telephone number 13 23 26. Complaints received during the by-election period will be managed according to the principles and processes set out in the policy. Complaints about possible electoral fraud will be managed according to the AEC's fraud control policy and procedures. Information on how to report any suspected fraud is available on the [AEC website](#).

The AEC is determined to combat disinformation. The AEC's active and, at times, forthright approach to social media engagement is a key part of combatting electoral mis and disinformation online. The AEC will also have a disinformation register for the Aston by-election that will list prominent pieces of disinformation regarding the by-election process. The AEC encourages voters to stop and consider when they encounter electoral communication, and to think about whether the information is reliable, current, and safe.

The AEC upholds the sanctity of the ballot paper in all its forms and at all times.

- 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.

These two maxims of ballot paper handling must never be breached and must underpin AEC operations, culture and standards.

5. Election processes are informed by health advice

This Service Plan includes any adjustments to AEC processes related to COVID-19. The AEC continues to work closely with relevant health authorities to ensure COVID-19 safety measures are guided by relevant health advice and other sources of information including the *Work Health and Safety Act* and Safe Work Australia.

In accordance with current advice, the AEC is implementing work health and safety (WHS) risk mitigation strategies throughout the election process and includes staff training. As COVID-19 restrictions have eased significantly, Secure Telephone Voting is not available for the by-election for COVID-affected voters.

COVID-19 safety measures in polling places

The AEC takes the safety of our election workers and voters seriously. We have appropriate measures in place to minimise the spread of COVID-19 including:

- AEC staff, voters, and visitors will be strongly encouraged to wear face masks in polling places and continue to practise good personal hygiene.
- Hand sanitiser will be available on entry and exit at all polling places.
- Hygiene officers will undertake regular touchpoint cleaning and will ensure COVID-19 safety measures are in place. Cleaning by the hygiene officer is in addition to routine cleaning arrangements in our venues.
- Signage about personal hygiene and physical distancing will be prominent in all polling places.
- Physical distancing of 1.5m will be maintained wherever possible.
- There will be clean pencils available, and voters are also able to bring their own pencil or pen. Voters will be asked to deposit their used AEC pencil in the box at the exit to the polling place so that the pencils can be sanitised by the hygiene officer after every use.

The officer-in-charge of each polling place will have overall responsibility for ensuring that AEC COVID-19 safety measures are implemented and remain in place during the polling period. In addition, all workers on an AEC site have a responsibility to ensure they are acting with COVID-19 safety as a priority.

COVID-19 safety measures during counting

- AEC staff and visitors to a count centre will be strongly encouraged to wear face masks and continue to practise good personal hygiene.
- Signage about personal hygiene and physical distancing will be prominent in all counting centres. Where possible, sort and count tables will be positioned to allow for physical distancing.
- Hand sanitiser will be available on entry and exit, work areas and common areas (such as kitchens). Masks will also be available.
- Regular touchpoint cleaning will be undertaken as well as regular cleaning of surfaces, and breakout areas during operational hours.

Training

All early voting and polling day staff will receive online COVID-19 related WHS training.

A WHS briefing will be delivered at each counting centre to all staff. This is to ensure staff are aware of local WHS information and their responsibilities as a worker. The briefing will cover:

- COVID-19 safety measures including personal protective equipment use and disposal and physical distancing
- First Aid Officers and Emergency Wardens
- emergency procedures
- first aid room and equipment
- work area and housekeeping
- workplace hazards and fatigue management
- reporting hazards and incidents.

Further information

For more information on the Aston by-election visit the [AEC website](#) or call 13 23 26.