

# Compliance Strategy

May 2026 - Version 1

# Foreword



I am excited to present the inaugural Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) Compliance Strategy (Strategy).

Our Strategy builds on the strategic direction of the [AEC Regulatory Framework](#), providing additional detail as to what the regulated community can expect from the AEC as a regulator.

The AEC has served as Australia's independent and impartial electoral management body for over 40 years. We recognise that we operate in an increasingly complex and volatile environment both globally and domestically. The rapid pace of technological advancements and diminishing public trust in democratic systems demand our vigilance and agility. It is critical that we act where conduct may compromise or cast doubt on the fairness, legitimacy, and impartiality of the electoral system.

As our regulatory responsibilities under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) expand, our regulatory governance will continue to evolve. This is why we have developed a holistic, risk-based approach to regulation and a Strategy that promotes our responsive approach to compliance.

We will support those we regulate to mature alongside us by ensuring they understand their obligations, comply consistently, and progressively embed best practice.

The end-state of this journey is regulatory stewardship – where the AEC and its regulated community jointly contribute to the integrity of electoral processes through a sustainable compliance culture built on ongoing cooperation to achieve best practice regulatory outcomes.

Our Strategy supports transparency, accountability and public confidence in our ability to manage challenges to the integrity of electoral processes. It communicates how we focus our efforts and direct resources to address issues posing the most serious risk of harm to the integrity of electoral processes, while ensuring our regulatory responses align with our values and principles. It reflects our commitment to lead through education, communication, and guidance tailored to our regulated community.

Our Strategy is both a roadmap of our path to regulatory stewardship as a leading regulator, and a reflection of our regulatory objective.

**Rachel Houghton**  
Chief Operating Officer

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# Introduction

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The Strategy explains how we will operationalise our risk-based, intelligence-informed, and technology-enabled regulatory posture with the regulated community by:

- explaining how we encourage compliance and the details of actions we may take in response to non-compliance with electoral and referendum laws, and
- reaffirming our enduring compliance priorities as part of our regulatory objective.

Safeguarding the integrity of electoral processes is the foundation of our regulatory posture and compliance operations.

Failing to comply with regulatory obligations may breach legal requirements and it can compromise the integrity of electoral processes. It can also:

- detract from the transparency of the electoral system
- subvert free and informed voting at elections and referendums, and
- undermine public confidence in the AEC or the electoral system.

A regulated community that proactively and consistently complies with their regulatory obligations upholds the integrity of electoral processes, and:

- enhances transparency and trust in the electoral system
- promotes confidence in the electoral system, and
- enables the AEC to focus on matters of the most serious harm to the electoral system.

Our regulatory posture is designed to promote engagement with our regulated community to ensure that they understand and can comply with legislative requirements. It also enables us to respond to instances of non-compliance proportionate to the risk of harm to the integrity of electoral processes.

This Strategy reflects our dedication to be a leading regulator that fosters and supports a culture of voluntary self-compliance, continuous improvement, and regulatory stewardship. The Strategy will be reviewed and updated at least every three years to remain adaptable to the changing environment.

The AEC has enduring compliance priorities across our key regulatory areas that are responsive to emerging risks, trends, and opportunities.

An overview of compliance requirements for each of our five key regulatory areas and links to related documents, legislation, and information can be found at the end of the Strategy.

# Our regulatory response

How the regulated community complies or fails to comply with their legislative and regulatory obligations determines how we respond and the actions available to us.

We ensure our compliance actions are responsive and risk-based with reference to our compliance model.

Our regulatory activity is focused on proactively enabling compliance by informing and engaging with our regulated community. Where a person or entity fails to comply, we respond by correcting and deterring the behaviour. Where non-compliance is repeated, intentional, or serious, we will take proportionate enforcement action while also meeting our obligations as a model litigant.

We take a range of compliance actions to promote compliance and respond to non-compliance. We assess reported and detected non-compliance, prioritise matters, and respond with targeted actions to use our resources efficiently.

We ensure our compliance actions are proportionate in the circumstances by considering:

## Nature of the breach

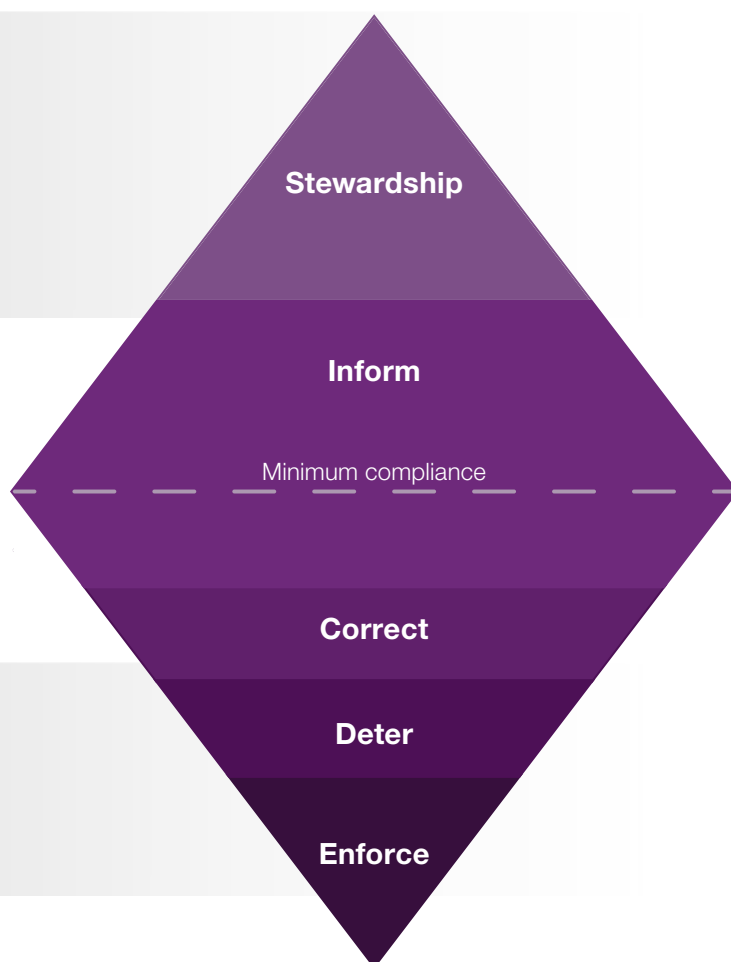
We consider the extent, seriousness, and consequences of the breach. The consequences and seriousness of a breach may change depending on proximity to an electoral event.

## Behaviour

We consider compliance history, willingness to cooperate, likelihood of continued non-compliance, and any previous communications or actions (e.g. prior warnings and fines).

## Public interest

We consider broader factors such as the need for deterrence, other available compliance actions, and public expectations.



# Stewardship



We actively encourage our regulated community to embody regulatory stewardship to ensure they go beyond meeting the minimum compliance standard. We promote practices that sustain the integrity of electoral processes.

Stewardship will mean different things to different members of our regulated community and determine how they can jointly contribute towards stewardship with the AEC.

- For individual voters, beyond fulfilling their entitlement and civic duty to enrol, obligation to update their enrolment and vote, stewardship might involve recognising and reporting any conduct that may harm the integrity of Australia's electoral processes.
- For entities such as registered political parties, the journey to stewardship might involve embracing a cooperative approach to compliance that embeds best practice processes in everyday operations to lessen regulatory burden on them, their supporters and the AEC.
- For a person or entity required to authorise their communications of electoral matter, stewardship might mean evolving their approach and integrating best practice guidance. This could include adjusting how they develop, authorise, and publish electoral material (for example, following recommendations in the [AEC's Authorisations Better Practice Guide](#)).

# Inform



We **inform** the regulated community of their obligations and support them to comply through actions including:

- **Publishing educative material** such as guidelines, fact sheets, and web page content across our regulatory areas on the official AEC website.
- **Communicating relevant information** (i.e. statements, media responses and investigations outcomes) on the AEC website addressing key concerns or identified issues to inform the public and the regulated community.
- **Engaging constructively** with the regulated community directly (i.e. letters, emails, phone) to provide targeted information and to ensure that behaviour does not become non-compliant.

# Correct



We continuously monitor compliance to identify and **correct** non-compliant behaviour through proactive and responsive actions such as:

- **Risk-based compliance reviews** to identify non-compliance by analysing intelligence from various sources, including reports from other agencies, regulators, the public and information submitted by individuals and entities.

These reviews provide early visibility of issues and help keep us informed and aware of where more serious interventions are required.

We make an initial assessment of available information to determine whether a contravention may have occurred and the potential risk of harm to prioritise appropriately. In the first instance, we will typically engage with the person responsible to rectify the issue in a timely manner:

- **Notification** may be provided to individuals or entities to address possible non-compliance and guide remedial action. This is typically used where the identified breach presents a minimal risk of harm to the integrity of electoral processes.

# Deter

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We will take stronger action to **deter** non-compliant behaviour. We will exercise our legislative powers where there are repeated incidents that present a substantial risk of harm to the integrity of electoral and democratic processes, or there is deliberate avoidant behaviour. Depending on the seriousness or consequences of the breach, the AEC may at any time take the following actions to deter non-compliance instead of, or in addition to, corrective or enforcement action:

- **Lawful directions** may be given by an AEC official during polling to prevent misconduct and control behaviour at a polling booth. Failure to comply with a lawful direction is a criminal offence.
- **Formal warnings** are issued where informal notification is considered inappropriate in the circumstances or has not previously corrected non-compliant behaviour.
- **Investigations** involve the collection and analysis of evidence, which may include interviews, and retrieval of evidence through legal means (e.g. requests for information or applications for a search warrant). The evidence we obtain will assist in determining whether we take enforcement action

# Enforce

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We **enforce** non-compliance with the law by taking administrative action or commencing civil or criminal proceedings. The type of enforcement action available depends on the specific regulatory area and will be taken in accordance with the *Legal Services Directions 2025* and our obligation to be a model litigant. Action may include:

- **Administrative penalties** - formal administrative action that requires monetary payment.
- **Injunctions** - court orders to prevent or stop conduct that is potentially in breach of the law. Injunctions can be used where immediate intervention is required to protect the integrity of electoral processes.
- **Enforceable undertakings** - legally binding agreements that can be enforceable in court as an alternative to court proceedings. Enforceable undertakings are voluntarily entered into by a regulated individual or entity, who commits to take specific corrective actions to address a contravention or prevent future occurrence.
- **Civil penalty orders** - court-imposed financial penalty for contraventions of civil penalty provisions. We may apply for a civil penalty order where we determine there are reasonable grounds to do so, and consider if the non-compliance is serious or repeated, among other factors.
- **Referral for criminal prosecution** - referral of potential offences by individuals under certain legislative provisions. We may refer allegations of an offence to the Australian Federal Police or the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for criminal prosecution. A finding of guilt in a criminal prosecution may result in criminal convictions, fines, and, in the most severe cases, imprisonment.

# Our compliance priorities

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Our compliance priorities direct the focus of our efforts to achieve our regulatory objective.

We identify non-compliance across our regulatory areas by analysing available data, environmental scanning, and engaging with our partners.

## *Our regulatory objective*

*To be the steward of electoral processes and electoral integrity through promoting active, informed and equitable participation by all Australians.*

### **Political finance and registrations**



Promote transparency of political donations and timely public disclosure of electoral expenditure and donations.

Ensure political parties and entities are registered in accordance with requirements and maintain their registration information.

### **Authorisation of communications**



Ensure that electoral communications are correctly authorised so that voters know their source.

### **Roll and event integrity**



Ensure that all eligible Australians enrol, keep their enrolment details up to date, and vote at every election and referendum.

Contribute to providing assurance and maintaining high levels of public trust in the integrity of electoral events, processes and the electoral roll.

# Our key regulatory areas

We are responsible for the regulation of five key areas of the electoral system. This section provides an overview of each regulatory area and specific legislative provisions that we administer under the Electoral Act, Referendum Act and certain legislative instruments.

## Enrolment and voting

### What we regulate

We regulate Australia's system of compulsory enrolment and voting for federal elections and referendums. We administer and enforce legislative provisions relating to eligibility, enrolment, and voting.

### Who we regulate

All Australians that are eligible to enrol and vote at federal elections and referendums.

### Where to learn more

For further information, please refer to:

- [Electoral Backgrounder: Compulsory voting](#)
- [Electoral Backgrounder: Multiple voting](#)
- [Enrolment and Eligibility information](#)
- [AEC: Voting options](#)

### The Law

#### Electoral Act

Part VII	Qualifications and disqualifications for enrolment and for voting
Part VIII	Enrolment
Part XVC	Designated electors
Part XXI	Electoral offences

#### Referendum Act

Part X	Offences
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#### Electoral and Referendum Regulation 2016

All Australian citizens over the age of 18 are required to enrol.

Compulsory voting for federal elections and referendums is required by section 245 of the Electoral Act and section 45 of the Referendum Act respectively.

Voting more than once at a federal election or referendum is a criminal offence. Electors may be prosecuted for multi-voting. Electors suspected of multiple voting may also be declared 'designated electors'.

# Political finance

## What we regulate

We are responsible for regulating the Commonwealth electoral funding and disclosure scheme (FAD Scheme).

This includes:

- disclosure requirements for electoral expenditure and donations
- entity registration requirements
- entitlement to, and payment of, election funding and administrative assistance funding
- electoral expenditure and gift caps, and
- prohibitions on foreign donors and donations.

## The Law

### Electoral Act

Part XX Election funding and financial disclosure

### Referendum Act

Part VIIIA Disclosure of referendum expenditure and gifts

Please note that certain changes made by the *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025* do not commence operation until 1 January 2027.

## Who we regulate

All communicators of electoral or political matter during the relevant period, which may include:

- Members of the House of Representatives (HoR)
- Registered political parties (RPPs)
- Candidates
- Party agents
- Financial controllers
- Third parties
- Associated entities
- Senators
- State branches of RPPs
- Groups of candidates
- Registered officers
- Donors
- Significant third parties
- Nominated entities (from 1 January 2027)
- Referendum entities

## Where to learn more

For further information, please refer to:

- [AEC: Election Funding](#)
- [AEC: Financial Disclosure](#)
- [AEC: Transparency Register](#)
- [AEC: Compliance and Enforcement for Financial and Referendum Disclosure](#)
- [Report a Suspected Disclosure Scheme Breach](#)

# Authorisation of communications

## What we regulate

We are responsible for regulating the communication of federal electoral matter (both printed and digital) to ensure it is properly authorised so that voters know the source of the communication.

Individuals or entities that communicate electoral matter that is paid for or printed, by or on behalf of, a disclosure entity are required to authorise the communication.

We provide best practice guidance and education, monitor public communications, receive complaints, and investigate potential breaches. Where necessary, we take enforcement action to ensure compliance.

## Who we regulate

Persons or entities who are required to authorise electoral matter:

- Members of the House of Representatives (HoR)
- Registered political parties (RPPs)
- Candidates and Senate groups
- Significant third parties
- Persons and entities that pay to communicate electoral matter
- Senators
- State branches of RPPs
- Third parties
- Associated entities
- Individuals or entities who approve and distribute print communications

## Where to learn more

For further information, please refer to:

- [AEC: Authorising Electoral Communications](#)
- [AEC: Compliance & Enforcement Activities](#)

## The Law

### Electoral Act

Part XXA Authorisation of electoral matter

### Referendum Act

Part IX Authorisation of referendum matter

### Commonwealth Electoral (Authorisation of Voter Communication) Determination 2021

# Registration of political parties

## What we regulate

We are responsible for regulating political entities that apply to register as a political party and ensure that eligibility for registration is maintained.

Political entities, and individuals acting on their behalf, that seek to register as a political party and maintain their registration have obligations under the Electoral Act.

We assess applications, verify membership lists and eligibility and review eligibility.

## Who we regulate

- Political parties
- Party secretaries
- Candidates
- Party agents
- Registered officers and deputy registered officers

### The Law

#### **Electoral Act**

Part XI                      Registration of political parties

## Where to learn more

For further information, please refer to:

- [Political Party Registration](#)
- [AEC: Political Parties](#)

# Election and roll integrity

## What we regulate

We are responsible for regulating conduct that may undermine or otherwise impede the fairness, safety, and integrity of the electoral process, as outlined in the Electoral Act.

This includes conduct that may disrupt polling places, damage or deface ballot papers, affect the integrity of the electoral roll, or otherwise risk harm to the integrity of the election.

## The Law

### Electoral Act

Part VI	Electoral Rolls
Part XX	Election funding and financial disclosure
Part XXI	Electoral offences
Part XXII	Court of Disputed Returns

### Referendum Act

Part X	Offences
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## Who we regulate

In certain circumstances, anyone who is suspected of committing an offence under the Electoral Act or Referendum Act, which could include:

- Registered political parties (RPPs)
- Party agents
- Candidates
- Electoral workers and officials
- Branches of RPPs
- Volunteers and paid agents acting on behalf of an RPP or candidate
- Campaign workers
- Scrutineers
- Voters enrolled to vote or eligible to vote

## Where to learn more

For further information, please refer to:

- [AEC: Electoral Backgrounder - polling place and other offences](#)
- [AEC: Electoral roll data entitlement](#)
- [Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce](#)
- [Fair Work \(Registered Organisations\) Act 2009](#)

# Related documents, legislation and information

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- [AEC Regulatory Framework](#)
- [AEC 2025–26 Corporate Plan - Australian Electoral Commission](#)
- [AEC: Compliance and Enforcement information](#)
- [Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918](#)
- [Referendum \(Machinery Provisions\) Act 1984](#)
- [Commonwealth Electoral \(Authorisation of Voter Communication\) Determination 2021](#)