

## JSCEM Opening Statement – 23 May 2024

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Chair and Members,

Thank you for the invitation to appear today. I do want to make some brief opening remarks.

Over our agency's 40-year history, the AEC has had a unique role in engaging communities and delivering education services on electoral matters. As the subject matter experts on federal electoral events, Australians look to us for help in understanding the process and how to fulfil their legal right and obligation to vote.

If I could highlight just a few of our many education and engagement activities for the benefit of this Committee:

- The National Electoral Education Centre is the AEC's flagship school education program at Old Parliament House. We are on track to host around **81,000 visitors in 2023-24**, running at near full capacity with **18 sessions held most days**.
- Our media team is proactive in building understanding of the electoral system, including using our own AEC TV Youtube content. At the referendum, we delivered **13 media briefings**, undertook **around 430 media interviews** (including in language) and **sent 39 media releases**.
- We have one of the most active and engaged social media presences across the public service, with **over 12 million online impressions** of AEC messages. And the Australian public likes talking to us -- during the Referendum writ to writ period we received **more than 130,000 incoming direct messages** alone.
- We run information campaigns each electoral event to explain why to vote, where to vote, and how to correctly complete a ballot paper, as well as our 'Stop and Consider' electoral misinformation campaign. Our referendum information campaigns had **over 1 billion impressions** through video, display, audio and social media.

Prioritising equitable inclusion and accessibility for voters is a key focus, and we have specific initiatives to support our work in this space. To name just a couple:

- The AEC's long-standing Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP) works with many Indigenous partners and directly engages with communities around Australia to encourage electoral participation and education in ways that are culturally suitable. **266 education sessions** were delivered in First Nations communities around Australia for the referendum and we have information available in **up to 25 First Nations languages**.

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- To support the participation of multicultural communities, we continue to consult to understand barriers to voting, information needs and engagement preferences. In 2023, the AEC met with **226 community leaders** representing **136 organisations**, and those leaders actively shared AEC materials with their communities. For the referendum, we delivered **117 education sessions** in **35 languages**.

Recent national and international events have demonstrated the range of emerging challenges in delivering impartial and independent elections. The environment remains complex, and is becoming even more so as all stakeholders grapple with more recent developments such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). We must continue to evolve our approach.

The AEC supports any efforts from government and civil society to invest in a national digital literacy campaign. Electoral management bodies cannot do it alone and isolated electoral campaigns no longer suffice.

Throughout its 40-year history, the AEC has adapted to meet changing community and stakeholder needs and the AEC's education and engagement functions must continue to transform into the future. This includes ensuring the broadest reach of our information, whether that is to all schools in Australia, or into remote and multicultural communities.

We continue to strive to be world leaders in education and engagement activities to uphold public trust in democracy and our electoral processes, and we welcome the discussions of this Committee.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.