

**Classification: OFFICIAL**

## JSCEM Opening Statement – 13 September 2024

---

Chair and Members,

Thank you for the invitation to appear today.

The AEC has a unique and important role in engaging communities, delivering electoral education services, and being the subject matter expert on federal electoral events. Quite rightly Australians look to us for help in understanding the process and how to fulfil their legal right and obligation to enrol and to vote.

Our education and engagement programs are admired by other international Electoral Management Bodies, and we make an important contribution to global best practice.

I'd like to take the opportunity to update you on a few of our education and engagement activities since we last appeared in May of this year:

- The National Electoral Education Centre is the AEC's flagship school education program at Old Parliament House. We are on track to host around **90,000 visitors** in 2024-2025, running at near full capacity with **18 sessions held most days**.
- In July, the AEC commenced a trial of digital education through the DemocraCity for Schools program, which enables schools that are unable to travel to Canberra, an immersive 3D electoral education video game. The game will be released for use by **all Australian schools, primarily aimed at primary school aged children, in 2025**. This is a significant step in increasing electoral education to more school students. We would welcome the opportunity to provide members of this Committee a demonstration of this program.
- Our **Get Voting** program provides schools with free resources and equipment to educate students on elections and the preferential voting system. We provide resources such as ballot boxes, ballot box seals, election posters and polling official badges. **Over the last 5 years, nearly 1,900 kits** have been sent to schools facilitating classroom elections for over **222,000 students**.

## OFFICIAL

- On social media, we are one of the most active and engaged agencies across the public service, with **over 12 million online impressions** of AEC messages during the referendum writ period. We use initiatives like **AEC TV** to communicate complex electoral information and to help us address emerging questions in an easily digestible format.
- Each electoral event we run information **campaigns** to explain why to vote, where to vote, and how to correctly complete a ballot paper, as well as our '**Stop and Consider**' campaign to help combat misinformation.

Prioritising equitable inclusion and accessibility for voters is always a key focus for the AEC, regardless of location or personal circumstance. Our current programs target communities and people who may experience barriers to electoral participation.

This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people with disabilities.

- 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. Our partnerships assist the AEC in understanding challenges to enrolment and assist in the co-design of initiatives.
- As part of IEPP, we also employ Community Electoral Participation Officers (CEPOs) to conduct electoral engagement and education activities, they are casually employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who are locally engaged to work in and around their community, in language. For the referendum **82 CEPOs** were engaged, **42 of which were bilingual, covering 16 languages**.
- To support the participation of multicultural communities, we continue to consult to understand barriers to voting, information needs and engagement preferences. For the **2024-2025 election, Multicultural Community Electoral Participation Officers** will be employed to deliver culturally suitable electoral education and outreach in their communities and will be based in **10 divisions** across NSW and Victoria that have historically experienced lower formality than other divisions.

## OFFICIAL

Throughout its 40-year history, the AEC has adapted to meet changing community and stakeholder needs and to ensure our engagement programs are expansive and diverse.

In addition to increased complexity surrounding electoral delivery, Australia is subject to the same global trends relating to cyber and physical security, misinformation, disinformation and electoral integrity that complicate elections in other democracies. In this context, our education and engagement activities are more critical than ever.

Electoral management bodies cannot do it alone and isolated electoral campaigns no longer suffice. The AEC sees value in a whole-of-government approach to improving digital media literacy to improve the public's ability to identify disinformation and reduce its spread. Research conducted by Harvard University with misinformation experts concluded that digital literacy – above debunking and prebunking – was the most effective intervention against misinformation when widely adopted. Investment in a **national digital literacy campaign** is possibly the most significant thing we can do to combat mis and disinformation.

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

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.