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Tabled by Mr Fenton
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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN Electoral Commission

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LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND
ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW
COMMITTEE

National Mutual Centre
Level 2 111 St George's Tce
Perth Western Australia 6000
GPO Box F316 Perth
Western Australia 6841
PHONE (08) 9214 0400
EMAIL waec@waec.wa.gov.au
WEBSITE www.waec.wa.gov.au
FAX (08) 9226 0577

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Mr G Fenton MLA
Chair, Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Legislative Assembly of Queensland
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Facsimile (07) 3406 7070

Submission No 14

FAXED
3/12/99

Dear Mr Fenton

Inquiry into Issues of Queensland Electoral Reform

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the above inquiry.

While most matters raised by the Queensland Electoral Commissioner in his letter to you, dated 25 October 1999, are of interest, they largely relate to specific operational matters requiring legislative amendment. Where I may be able to make a contribution to your deliberations is in respect of matters relating to the "Maintenance of Electoral Rolls" (Point 11 of Mr Shea's letter) and to issues associated with joint State and Commonwealth roll arrangements.

Maintenance of Electoral Rolls

I am particularly supportive of steps currently underway to develop continuous roll up-dating strategies (CRU), as opposed to the traditional door knock or habitation review. The traditional approach has clearly contributed to under-enrolment in a number of areas; especially in respect of electors in the 18-21 age group.

This Commission has initiated several CRU projects which aim to use data generated or held by State Government agencies for CRU purposes. For example, a pilot project commencing in early 2000, will use electronic data produced by the Department of Land Administration relating to property transactions, to identify residential addresses where there has been a change in occupancy. New owners of residential properties who have indicated they intend residing in the purchased property, will be sent electoral enrolment forms. These forms or the envelope provided will be specially marked in order to assess the viability of this CRU strategy.



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Likewise, preliminary discussions have been held with the State's Transport Department regarding data matching opportunities to seek change of address information and also details of drivers licence registrations by 17 and 18 year olds.

In 2000 this Commission also proposes to trial a CRU initiative which will involve paying schools \$2.00 for every completed electoral enrolment form leading to a valid enrolment. An alternative strategy in this area which may ultimately be trialed, is to use the State Curriculum Council's database to send all registered students an enrolment card on their 17th birthday.

These CRU developments have and will involve co-operative activity by both the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and this Commission, and agreement has been reached with respect to cost sharing.

Giving a statutory basis to the exchange of data for CRU purposes (as per the Queensland Electoral Commission's recommendations) may help with the implementation of associated initiatives by over-riding departmental policies limiting the provision of data.

Joint State/Commonwealth Roll Arrangements

Unlike Queensland, Western Australia maintains its own State Electoral Roll. Rather than a joint or common roll, the State and Commonwealth have a joint enrolment arrangement. This essentially involves the AEC's network of Divisional Offices processing most joint electoral enrolment forms received; and the AEC's Central Office forwarding each week or roll close, a CD Rom containing all enrolment transactions (additions, transfers and deletions) processed since the previous data file was issued.

Legislative differences mean that there are some State or Commonwealth only electors, however, generally the two rolls are within a few hundred electors of having the same total. Traditionally, a major difference between the two databases has been the level of accuracy of residential and postal address information.

This Commission is responsible for providing local governments with their district and ward residents rolls and the Sheriff with jury lists for the various court districts. With this in mind, and given the smaller size of State electoral districts compared with Federal divisions, the State has in the past placed greater emphasis than the Commonwealth on the need for accurate addressing. The situation has improved with the recent move to an address-based database by the AEC. Nevertheless, some problems do persist, including where the AEC do not accept locality names endorsed by the State's Geographic Names Committee

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From an administrative perspective, maintaining a separate State roll provides this Commission with greater autonomy and flexibility in the conduct of electoral events and in the provision of roll related products/services to customers. Much of the Enrolment Section's efforts are directed towards either audit and quality control work (and thereby ensuring a more accurate State Roll than would otherwise be the case) or meeting customer roll requirements (particularly those of local governments). Obviously, there is a degree of duplication and costs are incurred in maintaining a separate State roll.

Below is a summary of the major advantages/benefits versus the disadvantages/costs of maintaining a separate State Roll as opposed to a common State/Commonwealth Roll.

Advantages/Benefits

- Greater control and decision-making flexibility at election times over the printing of rolls and other roll related products (eg. Streets and Towns Directory).
- Easier to modify roll programs to produce required reports and to be more responsive to customer data needs.
- Increased capacity to generate revenue for the State from the sale of roll related products and services.
- Greater capacity to develop election systems that correspond precisely to the State's requirements (eg. Postal vote and General Postal Vote issuing).
- Increased opportunity to apply new technology to roll related processes – eg. At the next election the WAEC will trial marking electors names off electronic rolls in polling places that have traditionally taken numerous declaration votes – the electors will effectively be issued with an ordinary vote.
- Enables the State to amend legislation which will impact on or affect enrolment or roll production matters, independently of federal legislation.
- Increased potential for CRU activities and data matching with State agency databases.
- Easier to monitor AEC data entry standards and to apply quality control mechanisms to regulate incoming enrolment data.
- Provision of roll data to other State Government agencies for various purposes.

Disadvantages/Costs

- A degree of duplication of enrolment processing effort between the WAEC and AEC.
- Considerable investment in human resources, hardware and software to support a separate State Roll.

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- Potential confusion for electors caused by two rolls with some enrolment and special category eligibility differences (may exist whether a separate State roll is maintained or not).

Overall, it is my view that the advantages of maintaining a separate State roll outweigh the disadvantages.

Should the Queensland Government decide to establish a separate State roll, I would be pleased to assist the Queensland Electoral Commission during the implementation of any new arrangement.

Yours sincerely



Dr K W Evans
ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER

3 December 1999

cc: Hon. D Shave, MLA, Minister for Parliamentary & Electoral Affairs