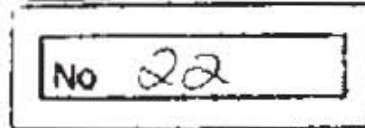


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Electoral Commission

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Dr Lesley Clark MP
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Dr Clark

Voices and Votes - An inquiry into young people's engagement in democracy in Queensland

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the 'Voices and Votes' parliamentary inquiry.

Enclosed is a short paper which describes the Western Australian Electoral Commission's experience concerning youth engagement in the State general election on 26 February 2005, as well as other ongoing youth initiatives, addressing the question 'What could the ECQ do better or differently to get its message across to young people?'

Prior to the 2005 State general election, the Commission carried out qualitative market research amongst younger age groups to identify the motivators and barriers to voting. The results and recommendations of this research formed the basis of the Commission's 2005 State general election and advertising campaign.

The Commission is also strongly involved in youth education through its Electoral Education Centre, which provides quality education services to primary and secondary schools as well as further education and adult groups.

I hope you find this paper useful in your inquiry. This information reflects the experiences of the Western Australian Electoral Commission and is not necessarily the view of the Western Australian Government.

Yours sincerely

Warwick Gately/AM
ACTING ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER

4 October 2005

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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION SUBMISSION TO 'VOICES AND VOTES'

Education/Information

Encouraging Young People to Participate in the Democratic Process.

The Western Australian Electoral Commission has a number of initiatives in place to encourage young people to play an active role in the democratic process. These include on-going programs as well as specific events.

2005 State General Election Advertising Campaign – 'It's best to be involved in the decision process'

The Commission conducted a State general election and a referendum on retail trading hours in February 2005. The aim of the advertising and public relations campaign for these events was to create awareness amongst the general community of electoral matters and encourage meaningful participation in the democratic process.

Survey information from the 2001 State general election identified age groups where voter turnout was traditionally low, resulting in an advertising campaign which targeted the younger age groups. In June 2004, prior to the development of the State general election advertising and public relations campaign, the Commission engaged a market research company to undertake qualitative market research into the motivators and barriers towards elector participation, with a specific focus on younger people.

Eight focus groups were held in the metropolitan area and 16 in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with electors in rural areas.

The market research covered attitudes towards voting, including voting as a civic responsibility and attitudes towards the different levels of voting (federal, State and local government); motivators and barriers to voting, including opinions on government and candidates; and reactions to advertising proposals.

The key findings of the market research included:

- although seen as a civic duty, voting was rarely mentioned spontaneously by interviewees;
- there was an amount of cynicism towards governments and politicians in general which led to a feeling that voting would not influence decision-making;
- there were both attitudinal and functional barriers to voting;
- the 'big stick' approach was viewed negatively; and
- politics did not have a big impact on the day-to-day lives of young people.

The market research found that the most likely way to break through to this target demographic of young people was by employing humour combined with a 'call to action' message that made the electoral process relevant to their lives.

The results helped determine the look and messages of the advertising campaign and the use of humour as the most likely way to break through to the target demographic. Creative concepts were developed for television, radio and print featuring everyday situations and the consequences of not having a say with the tagline 'It's best to be involved in the decision process.'

The Commission's main aims were to:

- encourage enrolment
- keep the electoral roll up-to-date
- maximise elector turnout

The advertising and public relations campaign had a high recall rate in the community, particularly within the target demographic, effectively promoting the Commission's core messages of enrolling to vote and participating in the election process.

In addition to the creative campaign, the Commission also took advantage of an ad-hoc advertising opportunity the day after the final of the popular 'Australian Idol' television program. Two advertisements were taken in *The West Australian* daily newspaper promoting the message of the importance of voting and being involved in the decision process and the alternative consequence of not being involved in the decision process.

'Birthday Card' Concept

The Commission has continued to use the 'It's best to be involved in the decision process' theme in its ongoing advertising, including local government elections and a direct mail-out of a 'birthday card' to year 12 students, urging them to enrol.



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2005 will be the third year the Commission has run its 'birthday card' initiative, which is designed to raise the awareness of the democratic process of students as they approach the age at which they can enrol to vote.

Names and addresses are provided to the Commission by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia, and all students on the database who are old enough to enrol, predominantly those in the final year of school, are sent the card (copy above), an enrolment form and a reply-paid envelope. In 2004, 24.14% of enrolment forms were filled in and returned to the Commission as a result of the mail out.

Table 1 - YEAR 12 ENROLMENT PROGRAM STATISTICS

Activity	Statistic
Number of enrolment claim forms distributed	22,868
Number of enrolment claim forms returned	5,520
Number of enrolment claim forms returned to sender	448
Number of enrolment claim forms received from people not on the database	478
% of enrolment claim forms returned	24.14%

In 2005 approximately 24,000 cards and enrolment forms will be sent out.

Electoral Education Centre

The Commission's Electoral Education Centre (EEC) continues to provide quality educational and community awareness programs to primary and high schools, as well as tertiary and community groups throughout Western Australia.

With a focus on State government matters, the EEC also provides comprehensive information about local and federal government processes. Services include:

- presentations at the centre
- school and TAFE visits
- conduct of school elections
- participation in a Joint Civics Education program (JCE), in conjunction with the Parliament of Western Australia and the Constitutional Centre of Western Australia; and
- a youth enrolment program.

The JCE receives strong support from country and metropolitan schools and is being expanded throughout the State.

Warwick Gately AM
ACTING ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER