

Question on Notice

No. 865

Asked on 12 August 2020

MS S BOLTON ASKED THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE (HON Y D'ATH) –

QUESTION:

Will the Attorney-General advise why the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) is proceeding with 'apparent failure to vote notices' following the March election, given the extreme circumstances voters were confronted with in a pandemic and the ECQ failures to accommodate demand in terms of postal and phone voting capacities?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Noosa for her question.

I am advised that the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) carefully considered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on voting in the 2020 local government elections and Bundamba and Currumbin State by-elections on 28 March 2020. The ECQ developed a tailored and proportionate response to non-voters at the March elections, in recognition that electors may not have voted due to heightened anxiety about COVID-19.

As a result, the ECQ will not take any action against first-time non-voters or electors who missed voting in previous elections but provided a valid excuse or paid their fine. Further, many non-voters have already provided a valid excuse to the ECQ. This represents over 90 percent of the electors who appear to have not voted at the March elections.

The only electors who will be subject to compliance action by the ECQ for not voting at the March elections, are repeat non-voters who have demonstrated a pattern of non-compliance with the ECQ's action for their failure to vote. This includes:

- Electors who have not voted in three or more elections, and who did not respond or comply with previous action by the ECQ. These electors will be sent an 'apparent failure to vote' notice which allows an opportunity to provide reasons for not voting. If the elector is unable to provide a valid reason, or do not engage with the ECQ, they will receive a fine; and
- Electors who have not voted in two elections, including March, and did not respond or comply with previous action by the ECQ, will be sent a warning letter that reminds them that voting is compulsory and of the expanded voting options available for the State general election in October 2020.

This approach has been carefully considered to ensure that habitual non-voters are subject to compliance action for failing to vote, while acknowledging the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ECQ is well-advanced with preparations for the State general election on 31 October 2020 and will provide for a range of health protection measures and expanded voting options, ensuring all electors have the opportunity to vote.