



### The Organisation:

The ACT Electoral Commission is an independent statutory authority with responsibility for:

- the conduct of elections and referendums for the ACT Legislative Assembly;
- the determination of electoral boundaries for the ACT; and
- the provision of electoral advice and services to a wide range of clients.

Elections ACT is made up of the staff assisting the Commissioner – the Deputy Commissioner, four full-time staff members and one part-time staff member.

### The Education Program:

The key objectives of the Commission's electoral education program are:

- at election time, to ensure that the voters of the ACT know when the election is to be held, where and when they can vote, how to vote and when a timely, accurate and transparent result is expected; and
- to facilitate school and community programs that place elections within a civics and citizenship framework, illustrate the process of the Hare-Clark electoral system and encourage enrolment.

The Commission undertook an extensive community education campaign in the lead-up to the 2012 Legislative Assembly election (see page 2).

Elections ACT staff provide ongoing electoral education services to school, community and professional groups. The education program is aimed primarily at raising community awareness of the ACT's electoral system. Sessions include mock elections for school and community groups, conduct of Student Representative Council elections and Public Service seminars.

Elections ACT has a dedicated electoral education/information officer with formal teaching qualifications and experience. Other Elections ACT staff members assist with the conduct of electoral education sessions. The education program is focussed primarily on students in the upper primary and lower secondary years, and is aimed at increasing knowledge of the electoral system.

Elections ACT's education sessions are often conducted in cooperation with the Parliamentary Education Office of the Legislative Assembly as part a joint program tailored to meet the needs of particular groups. Participants at these sessions are shown how the Members of the Legislative Assembly are elected and how the Assembly functions. An education session can be taken into schools using these same materials.

In addition to conducting face-to-face education sessions, Elections ACT has developed a range of printed electoral education resources for distribution to schools and community



groups. This material is primarily aimed at providing teachers with the ability to conduct electoral education in their own classrooms and consists of:



- factsheets – updated in 2013 to include a set aimed at Year 5 reading level
- classroom activities
- “Waterworld” – a unit of work for upper primary students
- *Electoral Compendium 1989-2011* – currently being updated following the 2012 election.

All electoral education material is available from the Elections ACT website.

General electoral information was written and translated into 12 languages other than English and appears on the homepage of Elections ACT’s website.

The Commission encourages schools to elect members to their Student Representative Council using the Hare-Clark system. It offers assistance such as loaning electoral equipment and assisting with the election and scrutiny with the aim of building skills within schools and contributing to students’ experience of the democratic process.

A series of documents is available on the Elections ACT website to guide teachers through the electoral process so they can run their own school elections. The documents include:

- instructions on the election process, the voting system, election day and counting the votes;
- a nomination form;
- ballot papers; and
- a scrutiny sheet that uses the Hare-Clark system to calculate the result automatically.

Elections ACT also collaborates with the Legislative Assembly’s Parliamentary Education Office in the delivery of Teachers’ Professional Development Days twice a year. These are attended by teachers from a number of colleges and primary schools, both government and non-government.

A review of the Education and Communication Strategy is currently underway.

### **Community education campaign for the 2012 election:**

The Commission undertook an extensive communication campaign leading up to the 2012 election. The role of campaign manager is undertaken by the Education & Information Officer.

The campaign communicated several messages to ACT electors, including:

- informing ACT electors that there would be an election for the ACT Legislative Assembly on 20 October 2012;
- informing potential electors when and how to enrol before the electoral roll closed with special focus on the 18-25 year old age group;

- informing electors which electorate they were enrolled in (emphasising the 2011 redistribution of electorate boundaries which transferred the suburbs of Crace and Palmerston from Molonglo to Ginninderra);
- ensuring the public was aware that voting is compulsory;
- providing information about how to cast a valid and informed vote (including an explanation of the implications of preference choice such as preferencing a single candidate, preferencing as many candidates as there are seats in the electorate, or giving preferences to as many candidates as the elector wishes);
- providing information about the physical requirements of the election, such as where to vote, when to vote, what to do in special circumstances (including information on pre-poll voting, postal voting and voting at polling places on polling day);
- informing voters of the 100 metre ban on political canvassing outside polling places; and
- informing voters that electronic voting was available at pre-poll voting centres and equipping voters to use this method of voting.

The campaign also included providing information to political parties and potential candidates to ensure they understood the requirements they needed to meet in order to actively participate in the election.



The Commission worked closely with the publishing arm of ACT government to modernise the look and feel of the election information campaign by updating artwork and incorporating new branding and formatting for the 2012 election. This creative partnership resulted in the successful development of different icons which assisted electors to visually identify the Commission's 2012 election information campaign.

The information campaign included the following methods for engaging electors:

- television, radio, newspaper and online advertising;
- ads included on the continuous video loops in ACT government shopfronts;
- media releases;
- mail outs of two information booklets to every household in the ACT and on display in Canberra Connect shopfronts and MyWay bus centres;
- large format ads in bus shelters;
- establishing a contact centre with the ACT government service provider, Canberra Connect;
- Elections ACT website;
- social media – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube;
- providing targeted information for people with disabilities, those from culturally and linguistically diverse background and those from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community within the ACT;
- school and community group programs; and
- market research.

### Social Media:

The Commission used social media for the first time in the lead-up to the 2012 election to engage voters, particularly those between the ages of 18-25. The social media tools used during the campaign included Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

To encourage users to access the Elections ACT Facebook page and in an effort to boost enrolment particularly in the 18-25 year old age bracket, Elections ACT launched a social media competition to win 1 of 2 electronic tablets by “liking” the Elections ACT Facebook page. To be eligible to participate, entrants had to be correctly enrolled in the ACT. The competition was supported with targeted advertising through Facebook and a poster campaign in ACT secondary colleges and high schools with Year 12 students.

Market research exit polling conducted for the Commission at polling places indicated that around 28% of respondents recalled seeing Elections ACT social media material. The exit polling also indicated that around 6% of voters (mostly young people) rated the Elections ACT social media as their most useful information medium.

### Activities aimed at people with special needs:

A key component of the Commission’s communication strategy was to assist people with special needs, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with vision or hearing impairment. The focus was to ensure people understood the compulsory nature of enrolment and voting, and how to validly vote at the election.

The Commission undertook a range of activities to encourage participation of members of the multicultural community. It:

- analysed the language needs of the ACT multicultural community to identify the most appropriate language groups to target with information material (using ABS data, the Commission identified 12 languages to be used: Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Italian, Farsi, Vietnamese, Croatian, Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, Serbian and Lao);
- employed and trained bilingual speakers in the targeted languages, where possible, to work in their language community in the 6 weeks prior to the election, educating voters on important aspects of the Legislative Assembly election;
- provided printed electoral information in the targeted languages to be disseminated by the bilingual educators and through Radio CMS and the Elections ACT website;
- inserted short articles targeting specific aspects of the election, such as the close of the electoral roll, in the ACT Multicultural e-News Bulletin published by the Office of Multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OMATSIA);
- provided instruction screens at electronic voting terminals in twelve languages;
- printed the Telephone Interpreter Service information panel on some Elections ACT publications, encouraging electors with limited English to make use of the service to assist with understanding electoral information; and
- maintained a register of language capacity of all casual staff to assist with the recruitment of bilingual educators.

The Commission also provided targeted information to members of the community as a way to encourage participation from people with special needs. It:

- provided several articles with election information to community groups for inclusion in their newsletters, including the ACT Office for Ageing E-newsletter, the ACT

Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) and the ACT Disability Advisory Council quarterly newsletter;

- made alternative formats for printed publications (such as large print, audio) available on request;
- arranged for the Elections ACT election guide to be read on Radio 1RPH (radio for the print-handicapped) and for the guide to be included in the Canberra Blind Society's monthly audio newsletter, which is sent to members and placed in Canberra public libraries; and
- disseminated the election guide, in an audio and print format, to Vision Australia and the Guide Dogs association and placed on the Elections ACT website.

The Commission, with the assistance of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, also produced a pamphlet using an indigenous theme with key messages for distribution to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Posters with this theme were displayed at communal venues of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

In recognition of the Commission's achievements with its information campaign for the 2012 ACT election, the Commission was presented with an ACT Multicultural Award in the Media category in November 2012.