



15 October 2012

Mr Jai Rowell MP
Chairman
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Rowell

Automatic Enrolment and Re-enrolment of Electors

I write in response to your letter of 20 September 2012 in which you seek information on the Commission's administrative procedures for maintaining the integrity of the NSW electoral roll given the rapidly increasing rate of enrolments achieved via the New South Wales Electoral Commission's (NSWEC) SmartRoll automatic enrolment and re-enrolment system.

I note that we discussed the broader issues of automatic enrolment at our meeting on Friday, 12 October 2012.

Over the past eighty years the NSW electoral roll has been managed by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The AEC's NSW roll was effectively the same as the NSWEC's NSW roll, other than for a very small number of "NSW-only" electors where, in the vast majority of cases, legislation allowed separate Federal and State enrolment. As discussed, this system was a paper based approach which relied on each elector completing a form to enrol and to advise of a change of address each time they moved address. It is expensive, inefficient and not effective as in this day and age people expect to be able to undertake these processes in the electronic environment. Effectively, as a consequence of the SmartRoll Project's 2010 beginnings and the growth in the rate that occurred prior to the 2012 Local Government Elections (LGE), that number of separate enrolments has increased to its peak of over 320,000. There is much discussion in electoral jurisdictions about "roll divergence". Of course, separate NSW State and Federal enrolments only become actual roll differences at the time of a Commonwealth election.

Following the passage of Commonwealth automatic enrolment legislation that allows for the AEC to follow similar processes to those undertaken by the NSW SmartRoll process, "divergence" will diminish as the AEC seeks to directly enrol those "NSW-only" electors for Federal elections. In the interim of course eligible electors continue to turn 18 and existing electors are continually moving their place of residence. This in turn leads to a greater risk of roll duplication as electors choose to newly enrol or re-enrol.

Managing this roll divergence and the eventual recovery from that divergence is a process that has been co-operatively managed jointly by the NSWEC and the AEC. As mentioned above, such activity is not without risks which careful database administration has minimised as the NSWEC has gained more understanding of demographics and electors' behaviour.



SmartRoll operates to either update an elector's enrolled address (to date we have updated over 320,000 electors' enrolment) or to add new electors to the roll (with the current total being over 160,000). The current NSW electoral roll is now over 4.77 million electors.

On the specific issue of roll duplicates that have crystallised during the LGE period, the NSWEC has undertaken a review and the level of duplicates between SmartRolled and AEC electors at the time of the LGE was 610. The level of duplication between those electors who had only ever been on the AEC managed roll was itself 175. All of these duplicates have now been brought to the attention of the AEC to remove them from their roll system.

An enrolment update via SmartRoll cannot result in an elector having a duplicate on the NSW roll as by definition the elector's original enrolment must be found before they can be updated. In contrast a new enrolment could potentially result in a duplication of an elector on the roll, typically if names, addresses or dates of birth are mis-matched during the data analysis process as a result of timing issues or the naming issues mentioned above.

The level of SmartRolled to AEC duplicates was as a consequence of:

- a subtle inaccuracy in the data matching algorithms used by SmartRoll system prior to May 2012 which has now been rectified; and
- timing issues such as those mentioned above, for example:—
 - a) a person has been SmartRolled as a new enrollee;
 - b) information about the SmartRollee is passed to the AEC;
 - c) the AEC subsequently add the person as a NSW-only enrolment – enrolment instance 1;
 - d) depending on the passage of time the AEC can receive a new enrolment from the elector via a paper form, with varied given names, and enrol the new elector at the old or a new address as a joint NSWEC/AEC enrolment – enrolment instance 2;
 - e) the elector is then enrolled as a “NSW –only” and as a joint State/Federal enrolment, leaving the person with a duplicated enrolment for NSW election purposes; and
 - f) the accuracy of data matching algorithms is of course then paramount.

The current high-level processes in place to minimise the re-occurrence of these errors are:

- Before adding a SmartRoll new elector to the roll, the current roll is checked to determine if the person might already be on the roll, and only added as a new elector if the analysis results in certainty that the person is not already on the roll. Further detail can be supplied.
- Periodically the roll is checked for duplicates. If the elector person has been SmartRolled then the NSWEC and AEC records are merged. If the duplicate has arisen through AEC processing the AEC will investigate and remove the duplicates.
- Where the duplication has arisen through SmartRoll processes but is found in AEC state-only or split enrolment data (because they have updated their systems with our information) then our action is determined case by case but is either to encourage the completion of an AEC enrolment or to submit a variation to the



AEC that corrects the enrolment either by the submission of revised data or via manual interaction.

If you or the Committee would like any further information on the operation of any aspect of SmartRoll please contact me on 9290 5910.

Yours sincerely

Colin Barry
Electoral Commissioner