PROPOSALS TO INCREASE VOTER ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND CONFIDENCE

Name: Name suppressed

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Thank you for your consideration of my suggestions.

I am an experienced senior election official with the NSW and Australian Electoral Commissions. My submission does not reflect the views or positions of either organisation.

Below are some suggestions that can support confidence, security and integrity in the electoral process and systems.

Removing Electoral Processes from the Constitution
Electoral processes and models should adapt and develop as and when required. There are items enshrined in the NSW Constitution that deal with electoral and voting processes - many of these items appearing in the Sixth and Seventh Schedules. Should electoral change ever be required, constitutional placement makes it overwhelmingly difficult for elected representatives and the NSWEC to update or improve these processes, let alone even consider such amendments. For example, it may be decided that NSW wishes to harmonise voting processes with most other jurisdictions and move to a model of compulsory preferential voting. Right now, this is practically impossible.

Alongside the 2027 State Election, there should be a referendum to remove these voting / electoral items from the Constitution; I understand this to be a Repeal of the Sixth and Seventh Schedules; there may also be other relevant areas. This should be supported by all representatives. It should be a presented as a necessary procedural updating, rather than a significant policy change. It is important to note, this is not removing the use of these processes - they are just better in legislation than in the Constitution.

NSW Electoral Commission to run all local government elections
The NSW Electoral Commission should return to being the sole provider of election services for all NSW local governments. Taking input from Councils, the Commission should make single or regional operational groupings of Councils as required for optimal service delivery efficiencies.

Postal Vote Applications Processing
PVA's should come under the sole control of the NSW Electoral Commission.

Electoral Material and Candidate Workers
For many voters, coming to vote is one of the few interactions they may have with a political representative.

The often undiscussed reality is that there is a significant proportion of voters who don't like the outside of the voting place experience with candidate workers and the handing out of materials. For obvious and not positive reasons, the experience is often referred to as "the gauntlet".

On top of that, an increasing amount of election staffing time is taken up dealing with issues and processes that happen outside of the voting place. As well, there are bins full of paper waste from material used for an average of moments.

If you want a greater chance at more connection with voters, consider having a different or varied experience out the front of voting places. Examples may include extending the "6m rule" to add more metres, preset tables of stuff to be handed out that people can approach and take if they wish, the EC being the "postmaster" and having some sort of signage summarising all the candidate options, having select "quiet" voting places with nothing out the front and a 1.5-2 week early voting period with the first part having no party workers.

Group = Group Voting Square
If you are a group of candidates, you get a group voting square. The end.

This simple, logical change resolves and improves matters for all stakeholders – from increased consistency for the voter to simplified and reduced processes for electoral staff.

Declaration Envelope
To simplify the declaration vote process, redesign the NSWEC Declaration Envelopes to a "Provisional" envelope and an "Absent" envelope or a single envelope for all scenarios as per the AEC.

Ballot Paper Instructions
The general stereotype of "no one reads the instruction manual" holds largely true for ballot papers. It's well past time for an update to the language and tone of ballot paper to give voters a better understanding of a more informed formal vote. Support with new simple language posters / signage on or near voting screens.

LA
Current:
"Write the number 1 in the square next to the candidate of your choice. You can show more choices, if you want to, by writing numbers in the other squares, starting with the number 2. Fold this ballot paper so your vote cannot be seen and place it in the ballot box (or in the envelope provided)."

Why this is not strong:
This direction leans heavily towards "Just Vote 1". It volunteers the option to show more choices but the language construction isn't encouraging - "can", commas for pauses and thought, "if you want" – it's too easy to opt out. Many people are not connected to voting, so this language and phrasing discourages involvement and this inquiry seeks more connection to the political system, through voting. Relatedly, stating that you need

to fold the ballot paper and where to put it at the outset distracts from the main desired act of voting including considering multiple candidates.

Better:
TOP
Write the number **1** in the square next to your most preferred candidate. Continue numbering preferred candidate squares from **2** through to [insert **total number of district nominations**] for as many other candidates as you choose.

BOTTOM
Thank you for voting today.
Put your completed ballot paper in the ballot box or provided envelope.

Why this is better:
It provides clear and direct instruction to enable (without bias or insinuation) a voter to cast their vote as they wish and for as many preferences as they wish. It mentions personal preference which adds an element of empowerment. It encourages you to put more preferences, ahead of the option to do so. It separates the voting instruction and the completed ballot paper handling instruction. It gives a nice acknowledgement and slightly simplified instructions on where to place the ballot paper.

LC
Group Vote OR *Candidate Vote*
Reasonings are similar to the above, with the added understanding that you are voting for actual things, ie. Groups OR Candidates and not administrative processes, ie. An Above The Line vote really just tells you where on the paper to write, not who or what you are voting for.

Consider having the Group Voting option on the left side of the ballot paper in a similar model to the LA paper. The Candidate Vote on the right of the paper remains similar to the current BTL option. Provide a simple "OR" in the instructions and voting area to only mark one side of the paper.

Group Vote
Write the number **1** in the square next to your most preferred group. Continue numbering preferred group squares from **2** through to [insert **total number of groups**] for as many other groups as you choose.

Put your completed ballot paper in the ballot box or provided envelope.

Candidate Vote
Write the numbers **1 – 15** in the squares next to your most preferred candidates. Continue numbering preferred candidates squares from **16** through to [insert **total number of candidates**] for as many other candidates as you choose.

Put your completed ballot paper in the ballot box or provided envelope.

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Elections Australia
Australia does elections very well but the operational system is strained and something new is needed for the long term health and renewal of the front facing electoral system as well as all the parts that support it.

In line with the 2027 NSW State Election and 2027/2028 Federal Election, Australia is ready for a single, national electoral management system.

It's called, Elections Australia.

Bringing together the work of the AEC, NSWEC and all other Australian Electoral Commissions, Elections Australia is a single point of electoral contact for every election stakeholder, no matter where you are in the world or what Australian election is happening at any time.

Taking elements from all the current Commissions and involving experienced election staff in its' development, it's built fresh, from the bottom up. There may be varying levels of integration and these come together over time, towards a common, consistent and continually rigorous model of electoral operations.

The single organisation is funded to both run election events as well as operations between events.

On a national basis, developing work areas can be prioritised, eg. technology assisted voting pilots, continual electoral workforce development, a move to single voting place management for all contests, as well as deprioritised, eg. given election day attendance has dropped but the funding and logistical requirements to maintain every voting venue hasn't, undertake a selective rationalisation of election day venues.

Front facing elements include but not limited to:

elections.gov.au
The single starting point for every Australian electoral interaction and includes single online systems for enrolment and postal vote applications, potentially connected to myGov.

Single National Roll
Following on from the Federal Parliament JSCEM recommendation, take a model for a single national roll to National Cabinet and implement it.

Single Election (Voting Staff) Workforce
Build out the electoral workforce into a single, persistent framework which can be tapped in to for any Australian election, anywhere, at any time. There are elements of semi-automatic placements for entry level staff based on their location.

Visualise it as a bottom side up pyramid – the bulk of election day officials start at the top and as you slowly move down, the roles become fewer, more specialist and more permanent. The more specialist roles also extend into what you might find in the NSWEC's RO Offices and centralised operational centres as well as the AEC's OPCs.

For the first time, this allows Australia to build and nurture an active and persistent base of both generalist and specialist election organisational memory.

Single Election Operations + Electoral Workforce Support
Separate staffing that sits parallel and supports the workforce and processes, eg. legal, finance, IT, logistics, candidates, etc. Think of these as a ring of many small bottom down pyramids supporting the central, bottom down workforce cone.

Some of these work areas can more easily establish a single output (eg. logistics and venue management) and some will start under separate legislation (eg. funding and compliance) before coming under a single framework.

Single Voting Staff Nomenclature
Election Day - Voting Manager (VM), Assistant Voting Manager (AVM), Senior Voting Assistant (SVA), Voting Assistant (VA).

Early Voting - Early Voting Manager (EVM), Assistant Early Voting Manager (AEVM), Early Voting Assistant (EVA).