

**Submission
No 27**

**PROPOSALS TO INCREASE VOTER ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND
CONFIDENCE**

Organisation: Australian Electoral Commission

Date Received: 19 August 2024

Electoral Commissioner

The Hon Peter Primrose MLC
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Sydney, NSW, 2000

Dear Mr Primrose,

Inquiry into the proposal to increase voter engagement, participation and confidence

I appreciate the opportunity to provide a submission to the New South Wales Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into the proposal to increase voter engagement, participation and confidence. I firmly believe the task of safeguarding democracy and maintaining public confidence of electoral events is one that every Australian, and all Australian electoral management bodies must be engaged with.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is supportive of the work of the New South Wales Electoral Commission (NSWEC) and their efforts in these areas. Given the importance of safeguarding democracy for the future of all Australians, I felt it was appropriate to write to this Committee as it may find the AEC's experience, as outlined below, beneficial to their considerations.

The AEC has developed mechanisms for safeguarding electoral integrity and maintaining public confidence in the AEC. These will, by necessity, evolve over time to meet new challenges and the AEC has positioned itself in line with our values of integrity through professionalism, agility, and quality, to anticipate and respond to these as they arise.

The [Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce](#) (EIAT) was first stood up in 2018, and has become an integral source of confidence for electoral integrity. The EIAT includes relevant agencies across federal government, working together to provide information and advice to the Electoral Commissioner on matters that may compromise the real or perceived integrity of federal electoral events. The EIAT ensures information about these threats is efficiently referred to relevant agencies, facilitates cooperation and coordination, and enables agencies to work together to take any appropriate action. On request from the relevant Electoral Commissioner, the EIAT also provides support to state and territory whole-of-state electoral events.

The AEC maintains strong working partnerships with relevant security and intelligence agencies, and also provides support to state and territory electoral management bodies (EMBs) through the Interjurisdiction Forum on Electoral Integrity (IFEI). IFEI connects all Australian EMBs with relevant security and intelligence agencies, as well as policy agencies outside electoral cycles, and facilitates a sharing of information to support EMBs to manage the complex environment and build their security and integrity capabilities.

Additionally, within the AEC, I established the Defending Democracy Unit (DDU). Through the DDU, the AEC responds in a coordinated and consistent manner to threats to electoral integrity and Australia's democracy. This includes ensuring the AEC has a fulsome understanding of evolving domestic and international information environments. The DDU also manages the operation of the EIAT.

First published in 2022, the AEC's 'Reputation Management System' (RMS), promotes an ongoing and increased focus on electoral integrity, and ensuring public trust in electoral management processes. The RMS recognises and builds on the numerous activities already taking place across the AEC, to further safeguard confidence in the AEC's reputation as we move forward in an evolving electoral and information environment. The AEC cannot work alone in this regard. By collaborating across all levels

of government and engaging in ongoing strategic communication with voters, the media, international partners and civil society more broadly, we position ourselves as the authority in order to maintain public trust in elections, and increase voter engagement, participation and confidence.

In response to the changing information environment, and to help defend the Australian electoral process from the harms of electoral mis- and disinformation, the AEC established an online disinformation register prior to the 2022 federal election. That register, now a permanent feature of each federal electoral event, lists prominent pieces of disinformation regarding the electoral process, alongside the correct, fact-based information. I understand the NSWEC has introduced its own disinformation register.

The AEC also liaises closely with online media platforms regarding electoral integrity issues, including electoral mis- and disinformation. A key achievement from this engagement is the December 2022 publication of a *Statement of Intent* by the Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand (ECANZ). The statement supports Australian EMBs and online platform collaboration to address breaches of federal, state and territory electoral related laws, as well as breaches of online platforms' terms of service related to electoral integrity.

In support of voter education, the AEC also engages in other forms of 'pre-bunking', such as publishing short videos on the AEC's YouTube channel with factual electoral process information, and keeping a 'tactics' page to assist voters to identify the techniques used to spread mis- and disinformation.

To further combat the spread of false information about electoral processes, the AEC has run a 'Stop and Consider' campaign, prior to and during every federal electoral event since 2019. It encourages voters to think critically about sources of electoral information, to avoid being deceived or misled by mis- and disinformation and to support public understanding of electoral processes. I appreciate the efforts of NSWEC in adopting similar campaigns, further reinforcing these messages. The AEC supports any effort to invest in a national digital literacy campaign.

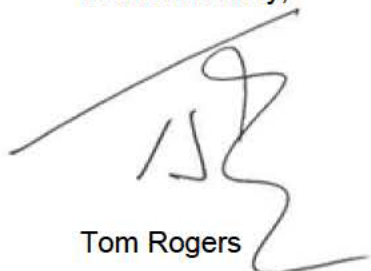
The AEC also works to support legislative and regulatory reform aimed at strengthening confidence in Australian electoral processes. We recently made submissions to various Commonwealth committees, and invite you to review these submissions for additional information (attached).

The role of safeguarding electoral integrity and security falls to all electoral management bodies and our experience shows that both Australian and international jurisdictions are grappling with similar issues. If there is anything further you believe will be valuable to your inquiry, we would be happy to discuss.

If you have any further questions, please contact:

Name	: Matthew Haigh
Position	: Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Integrity and Media Branch
Contact Number	: [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,



Tom Rogers

16 August 2024

Attachments – Australian Electoral Commission

[Statement of Intent by the Australian members of the Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand \(ECANZ\) concerning electoral management arrangements with online platforms for Australian Elections](#)

[AEC Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee - Criminal Code Amendment \(Protecting Commonwealth Frontline Workers\) Bill 2024 - Submission 2](#)

[AEC Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters \[Commonwealth Parliament\] - inquiry into civics education, engagement and participation in Australia - Submission 15](#)

[AEC Submission - Senate Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) - Submission 60](#)