

**BUDGET ESTIMATES 2023-2024 Supplementary questions Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance**

**Supplementary Questions to the NSW Electoral Commissioner**

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| 126  | John Schmidt       | 21              | <p><b>NSW Electoral Commission</b><br/>                     In the financial year 2022-23: (a) How much money did the NSWEC receive in relation to supporting voters with disability? (b) How many FTE staff were employed to carry out this work?</p> | <p>(a) A budget of \$418,000 for developing community education resources was allocated from project (non-ongoing) funding provided to the NSW Electoral Commission for the 2023 State election and for the previous year’s redistribution. This budget was for the creation of education and support assets for <b>all voters</b>, including voters living with disability, voters from CALD backgrounds, First Nations voters and voters experiencing homelessness. It supported the creation of translated resources in 24 languages, accessible video explainers about voting options and processes (also translated into the top 7 languages with lower English proficiency in NSW). Assets were commissioned from our Equal Access to Democracy Reference Group partners, including easy read guides and video from the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability, Auslan explainer videos from Deaf Connect Australia and the provision of Auslan interpreters for the election. Community education and support assets can be found on the <a href="#">community education resources page of our website</a>.</p> |

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|      |                    |                 |          | <p>(b) One ongoing staff member is funded for stakeholder and community engagement at the NSW Electoral Commission. They are responsible for the management of our Disability and CALD reference groups, outreach partnerships and the development of voter education materials for all electors, including people in groups facing additional barriers to participating in democracy.</p> <p>Apart from this role, the NSW Electoral Commission receives no ongoing funding for outreach and education with voters.</p> <p>For the 2023 State election, one additional role (Campaigns Coordinator Grade 5/6) was temporarily funded 2022-23 to assist in the creation of education and awareness resources.</p> <p>As part of its re-baselining submission for the 2023-24 budget, the NSW Electoral Commission will be seeking significant additional ongoing resources for these purposes.</p> |

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|      |                    |                 |  | <p>Both in terms of resources and budget, the NSW Electoral Commission compares unfavourably with some other jurisdictions. By way of comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Victorian Electoral Commission’s community engagement team employs 11 FTE permanent staff and 20-25 casual staff.</li> <li>• The Australian Electoral Commission’s community engagement team is comprised of 63 positions.</li> </ul> |
| 127  | John Schmidt       | 21              | Has the NSWEC engaged in any coordination with other jurisdictions to advocate for a nationally consistent technology assisted voting policies and systems?  | Since 2017, through the Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, the NSW Electoral Commission has advocated for the establishment of a national election platform to develop and operate core election systems (including technology assisted voting).  |
| 128  | John Schmidt       | 21-22           | What is being done to ensure that blind and low vision voters are absolutely without a doubt given several options to cast an independent, secret and verifiable vote by the 2027 state election and subsequent state and local government elections? (a) When will the Technology Assisted Voting Review be | The NSW Electoral Commissioner’s recommended approach in respect of electors who are blind or have low vision at the 2027 State election is set out in the final report of the review into technology assisted voting, published on 15 November 2023. This report is available at the NSW Electoral Commission’s website at:   |

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|      |                    |                 | complete and made publicly available? <i>Premier</i><br>(b) If a technology assisted voting system equivalent to the options provided by iVote is not available or sufficiently tested in time for the 2027 state election, will it be deferred?   | <a href="https://elections.nsw.gov.au/technology-assisted-voting-review/review-papers">https://elections.nsw.gov.au/technology-assisted-voting-review/review-papers</a>   |
| 129  | John Schmidt       | 22              | One of the issues identified by Vision Australia in their submission to the NSW Review of Technology Assisted Voting was that blind and low vision voters are not being adequately informed about the availability of voting options. What is being done to ensure that this information is accessible and available for people with disability? | <p>Vision Australia’s two submissions to the Technology Assisted Voting Review do not reference adequacy of informing voters who are blind or have low vision about the availability of voting options for the NSW State election.</p> <p>Vision Australia’s submission on 10 January (<a href="#">Submission reference TAVNSW130123-10</a>), does reference a qualitative survey it conducted after the 2022 Federal election and submitted to the Commonwealth Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in which the following statement was made:</p> <p><i>Some respondents to our survey of voter experiences in the 2022 Federal election said that they only found out about the availability of the Blind and Low Vision Telephone Voting Service on election day itself, while others noted the difficulty of taking time out from their job to register during business hours. It would not be an acceptable outcome if a person who is blind or has low vision were to be denied the opportunity</i></p> |

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|      |                    |                 |   | <p><i>to vote because they became aware of their options only after the registration period had closed and while the rest of the community was still able to vote. <a href="#">Link to Vision Australia TAV submission</a></i></p> <p>The NSW Electoral Commission communicates available voting options to all electors through our voter awareness campaigns. In addition, the Electoral Commission shares voter awareness resources and education materials on its accessible website, social media and meetings with our Equal Access to Democracy (Disability) Reference Group, which includes the peak bodies for people who are blind or have low vision. The Electoral Commission also creates specific stakeholder engagement resource kits at each state-wide election with information in a range of accessible formats for Reference Group participants to distribute information to their members. The NSW Electoral Commission is always seeking to improve its communications to reduce barriers to voting for all people in NSW and will continue to do so for future elections.</p> |
| 130  | John Schmidt       | 22              | <p><b>Access at polling places for people with sensory issues</b><br/>Anecdotal evidence indicates that polling places are largely inaccessible for people with</p> | <p>The NSW Electoral Commission consults with NSW peak bodies representing people living with disability ahead of each election through our Equal Access to Democracy (Disability)</p>   |

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|      |                    |                 | <p>sensory issues, especially people with autism and people with social anxiety. What measures and protocols are currently in place in relation to making polling places during NSW elections accessible? (a) Has the NSWEC consulted with any disability stakeholders about this issue? I. If yes, what form of consultation was undertaken and with which stakeholders? ii. If no, is there any intention to begin consultation with disability stakeholders? (b) What training and or information are NSWEC staff provided with about the nuances of people with disability in the community who are coming to vote? ie. Is this training mandatory?</p> | <p>Reference Group. This includes sharing information about voting options and early voting venues and working with reference group members to develop communications about elections that support voters who are living with disability.</p> <p>Organisations specifically representing voters with sensory issues that make attending voting centres difficult are not current members of the reference group. For upcoming elections, however, the Electoral Commission intends to consult more broadly about ways it may be able to support the needs of these voters.</p> <p>The Electoral Commission is also aware of recent customer service initiatives in the NSW public sector and in the private sector that may have some application for voting centres. The views of peak bodies and election participants will be sought, for example, about the feasibility of operating a trial quieter voting centre at an upcoming election.</p> <p>Commonwealth electoral legislation also permits a voter to vote outside, in close proximity to, a polling place, if the polling place manager is satisfied that the specific voter is unable to enter because of a physical disability, illness, advanced</p> |

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|      |                    |                 |          | <p>pregnancy or other condition. The NSW Electoral Commission has recently proposed similar arrangements under NSW legislation to allow voting to occur in this manner at the local government elections to be held in September 2024 and intends to propose such arrangements are also adopted for future state elections.</p> <p>The Electoral Commission engages around 25,000 election officials from across all NSW communities to work on a general election. Most of these officials work only on one day, being election day. The requirement to support voters with disability to vote in person is outlined in the mandatory online training module for all election officials.</p> |