

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
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**Miskin, Sarah (REPS)**

**From:** Mark Powell [markpowell@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, 18 February 2005 1:12 AM  
**To:** Committee, EM (REPS)  
**Cc:** Mason, Brett (Senator); Brandis, George (Senator); May, Margaret (MP)  
**Subject:** Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2004 Federal Election  
**Importance:** High

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17 February 2005

Mr Tony Smith MP  
 Federal Member for Casey  
 Chairman  
 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Dear Mr Smith

I refer to your inquiry into the conduct of the 2004 Federal election, and wish to make an initial submission about the use of joint polling booths.

Following the Queensland Federal Redistribution of 2003, the 2004 Federal election was held on new boundaries in much of Queensland. The changes were more dramatic in high growth areas such as the Gold Coast.

Apparently in an attempt to deal with voter dislocation caused by these boundary changes, the Australian Electoral Commission deployed a seemingly higher than usual number of joint polling booths. This was supposedly based on a policy that any booth where it was anticipated that there would be more than 200 absentee ballots at a booth from a nearby electorate, then that booth would be a joint polling booth. It would also serve the (admittedly worthy) purpose of ensuring the votes were counted 'on the night'.

My submission is that this wanton use of joint booths causes greater confusion to voters who are required to enter a booth to vote, than is justified by the benefits of the use of joint booths in many situations. For example, the Robina Town polling booth was a joint booth between the Moncrieff and McPherson electorates. While 3075 McPherson voters cast their ballots at the booth, only 351 Moncrieff electors votes there. I understand these figures are not substantially outside the AEC's forecasts.

In this example, nearly 90% of voters at the booth were from the McPherson electorate, yet each and every one would have been barraged by 2 sets of campaign material from each candidate in the electorates, then confronted with the two booths when they actually made it inside. Regardless of the best attempts of the AEC staff, this process must leave many voters confused. This is a very poor situation. I note that additionally, the Robina North polling booth has never been part of the Moncrieff electorate, nor is it located very close to the Moncrieff electoral boundaries. And this is but one example from across the entire country.

Further, the use of joint booths is wasteful of AEC resources and taxpayers money as a booth needs to be split in two and effectively staffed and equipped separately. It also disadvantages minor party and independent candidates compared to the larger and more established parties.

I submit that the use of joint booths needs to be significantly curtailed. I look forward to hearing the outcome of the committee's deliberations.

18/02/2005

Yours faithfully

Mark Powell

18/02/2005