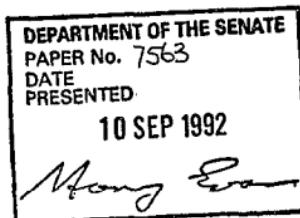


THE PARLIAMENT
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA



The Conduct of Elections: New Boundaries for Cooperation



REPORT FROM THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE
ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

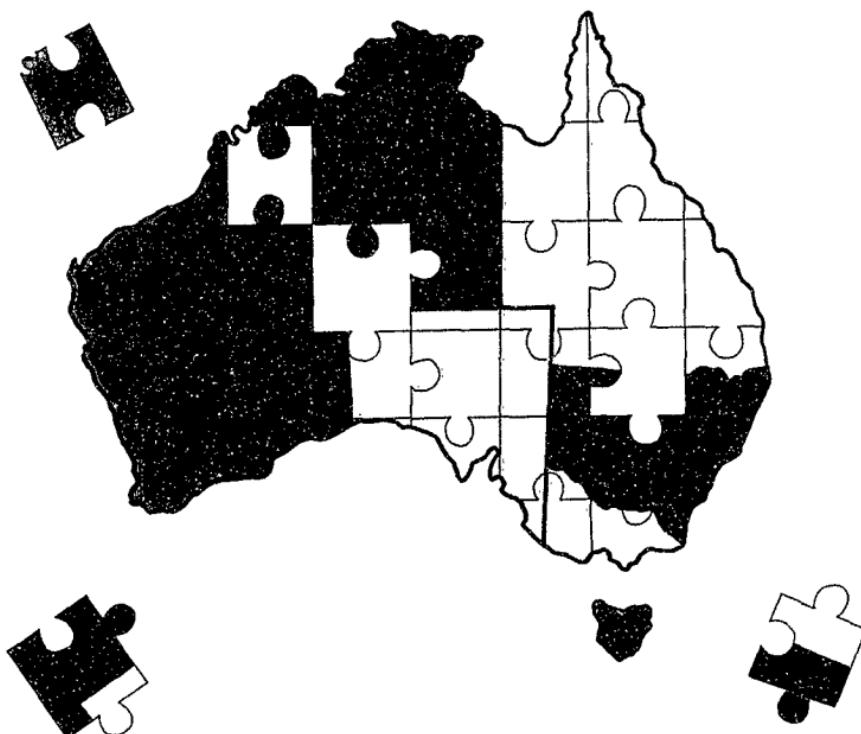
September 1992

Australian Government Publishing Service
Canberra



The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

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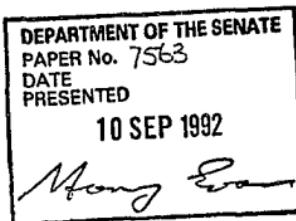


Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

September 1992

THE PARLIAMENT
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PPA
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New Boundaries for Cooperation



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ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

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Canberra

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ISBN 0 644 25251 0

Printed for AGPS by Pirie Printers Pty Limited, Fyshwick, A.C.T.

FOREWORD

The Committee was asked to inquire into resource sharing in the conduct of elections in September 1991. In October 1991 a fourth term of reference was added so that due consideration could be given to the electoral rolls. The inquiry was re-advertised and Public hearings were held in Canberra and in each of the States from February to May 1992.

The inquiry stretched the normal boundaries of Federal parliamentary committee work into areas of Federal-State relations which were both fascinating and delicate. The Committee was sensitive to the problems faced by both State and Federal electoral administrations in sharing information and ideas with each other and with the Committee. It was, at times, a difficult encounter and perhaps the participants have not emerged unscathed. In many cases the participants in the inquiry had the most to lose if the concepts being discussed were ever to become more than an idea.

We hope that the difficulties occasioned by the inquiry itself will soon fade, and the positive aspects of communication and cooperation will become its more lasting effects.

The report is unusual in that many of the recommendations can only be implemented with the cooperation of the States. Naturally the Committee has no mandate to make recommendations to either the State governments or the State electoral bodies. This has resulted in some difficulty in formulating the recommendations. The Committee hopes the States will accept its observations in the spirit of cooperation in which they are offered. We had no wish to tread forbidden paths or make unwelcome suggestions.

The Committee approached its task with some optimism, as it explored the possibility of significant cost savings for Australian taxpayers through collapsing the many electoral administrations into one. Enthusiasm waned from the first public hearing. The task seemed too large for the current stage of political and economic relations between the State and Federal administrations. The focus of the inquiry moved to less far-reaching resource sharing options.

The Committee is grateful for the assistance given by its two advisers, Mr Mike Duff and Mr Tim Glanville. We have studied the views of the submission writers and listened very carefully to the witnesses at the public hearings. We would like to acknowledge the help given by all these people. Their input, plus the Committee's own deliberations, have resulted in 59 recommendations which we hope will be merely the beginning of a new era of cooperation in the field of electoral administration.

Mr Arch Bevis, MP
Chairperson
Parliament House, Canberra
September 1992

TERMS OF REFERENCE

INQUIRY INTO RESOURCE SHARING IN THE CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS

To inquire into and report on:

- (i) the cost of running all Federal and State elections;
- (ii) the opportunities for further resource sharing between Commonwealth and State electoral bodies which could lead to savings for both the Commonwealth and State Governments;
- (iii) the practicality, cost-effectiveness, efficiency and social desirability of a single electoral body to conduct all Federal and State elections; and
- (iv) current methods and costs of maintaining electoral rolls for the conduct of Federal and State elections.

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(National Party – New South Wales)



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(ALP – New South Wales)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	Page
Foreword	iii
Terms of Reference	v
Membership of the Committee	vi
Appendices	xii
Tables	xiii
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Glossary	xiv
Summary and Recommendations	xv

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY

1.1 The State of Electoral Administration in Australia	1
1.2 The Committee's Approach to the Inquiry	2
1.3 The Terms of Reference	3
1.4 Local Government in the Inquiry	4
1.5 Major Issues Raised During the Inquiry	4
1.6 Relevance to the Terms of Reference	5
1.7 The Divisional Network	5
1.8 Consultation and the Electoral Rolls	7
1.9 The Impact of the Inquiry	8

CHAPTER 2 THE COST OF RUNNING ALL FEDERAL AND STATE ELECTIONS

2.1 Infrastructure Costs	10
2.2 Elements in Infrastructure Costs	11
2.3 Staffing as an Element in Infrastructure Costs	12
2.4 The Divisional Network: An Overview	15
2.5 The Divisional Network: Functions and Activities	18
2.6 The Divisional Network Reviewed	25
2.7 The Divisional Network – Recommendations	31
2.8 The AEC's State Head and Central Office Structure Compared with State Structures	32
2.9 Data Collection and Infrastructure Costs	34

2.10	Property and Office Services	35
2.11	Cost of Elections – Problems of Comparisons	36
2.12	Impact of Different Procedures on Costs	42
2.13	Training	44
2.14	Northern Territory Needs	45
2.15	Election Allowances and Payments	46

CHAPTER 3 SHARING AND SAVING

3.1	Resource Sharing and Cost Saving	49
3.2	Resource Sharing and Relationships	49
3.3	Pre-poll Voting and Postal Voting at State Elections	50
3.4	Information about Commonwealth and State Elections	54
3.5	Polling Places	55
3.6	Enforcement of Compulsory Voting	57
3.7	Auditing of Elections	58
3.8	Electoral Education	59
3.9	Electoral Research	60
3.10	Staff	61
3.11	Returning Officers – The Current Situation	64
3.12	Returning Officers – Resource Sharing	65
3.13	Premises for State Returning Officers	66
3.14	Storage of Material	69
3.15	Polling Officials and Other Casual Staff for Elections	69

CHAPTER 4 A SINGLE BODY FOR RUNNING ALL ELECTIONS?

4.1	The Committee's Approach to a 'Single Body'	74
4.2	Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: The Australian Electoral Commission	75
4.3	Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: The States	80
4.4	Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: Local Government	83
4.5	Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: Political Parties and Others	85
4.6	'Pros and Cons' – An Assessment of the Arguments For and Against a Single Body for the Conduct of Elections	88
4.7	'Those in Favour'	88
4.8	'Those Against'	92
4.9	Problems and Solutions	95

CHAPTER 5 MAINTAINING THE ROLLS BACKGROUND TO THE JOINT ROLLS

5.1	History of the Rolls – Early Days	97
5.2	The Introduction of Computers	102
5.3	The Development of Computerised Rolls by the AEC	105
5.4	RMANS and the Development of a Centralised Roll	108

CHAPTER 6 CURRENT METHODS AND COSTS OF ROLL MAINTENANCE

6.1	Difficulties in Assessing Roll Costs	110
6.2	The Cost of the Roll	111
6.3	The Cost of Maintaining 'Parallel' Rolls	113
6.4	Other State Costs	114
6.5	Comparison of Costs of the Centralised System (RMANS) and the Decentralised System (EAGLE)	115
6.6	Sharing the Cost	117
6.7	State Commissions: Responses to Claims	121
6.8	State Views on RMANS Output	127
6.9	New South Wales and RMANS	127
6.10	Victoria and RMANS	130
6.11	Queensland and RMANS	131
6.12	Western Australia and RMANS	132
6.13	Coding for the Roll and the Use of CCDs	132
6.14	Duplications on the Roll	135
6.15	Assessing the Roll	136
6.16	Consultation	140
6.17	Joint Management Committees	144
6.18	A Joint Roll Council	146
6.19	Membership of the Australian Joint Roll Council	149
6.20	The Role of the Australian Joint Roll Council	151
6.21	A Ministerial Council	153
6.22	The Provision of Roll Services under Contract	155
6.23	RMANS Compared with a Decentralised Database	157
6.24	Keeping the Roll Accurate – Statutory Requirements	163
6.25	Methodology	163
6.26	The Cost of Electoral Roll Reviews (ERRs)	166
6.27	Effectiveness of ERRs	167
6.28	Alternatives to ERRs	175
6.29	Joint Roll Allowances	181
6.30	Parallel Rolls	183
6.31	South Australian System	188
6.32	Conclusion	190

LIST OF APPENDICES

TABLES

	Page
Table 1 Annual infrastructure costs (excluding cost of industrial and miscellaneous elections, electoral roll review activities and redistributions).	12
Table 2 Electoral Commission staffing levels as at 31 January 1992 (including staff involved in the conduct of industrial and miscellaneous elections).	13
Table 3 AEC annual staffing costs.	15
Table 4 AEC property and office costs.	35
Table 5 Cost per elector excluding advertising expenditure.	39
Table 6 Comparison of average cost per elector in each jurisdiction over their last three elections (excluding advertising expenditure).	40
Table 7 Federal election costs including DROs (excluding advertising).	42
Table 8 Divisional staff election allowances.	46
Table 9 Total AEC expenditure on maintaining rolls.	112
Table 10 AEC's claim for 50 per cent of recovery of direct roll maintenance costs, compared with contributions made by States.	121
Table 11 The AEC's claim for 50 per cent of direct roll maintenance costs incurred in Victoria.	122

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AEO	Australian Electoral Officer
AERA	Australian Electoral Roll Authority (proposed)
AJRC	Australian Joint Roll Council
CCD	Census Collection Districts
CEO	<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>
DRO	Divisional Returning Officer (Commonwealth)
EARC	Electoral and Administrative Review Commission
ERR	Electoral Roll Review
JSCEM	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
MP	Member of Parliament
OIC	Officer in Charge (of a polling booth)
PSU	Public Sector Union
RMANS	Roll Management System
SEO	State Electoral Office
SRO	State Returning Officer
WAEC	Western Australian Electoral Commission

The word 'State' in the text, other than in the recommendations, includes the Northern Territory.

'Electoral Commissioners' includes the Chief Electoral Officers of the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

'Electoral Commission/s' includes Electoral Offices and Departments.

GLOSSARY

declaration vote	A postal vote, a pre-poll vote, an absent vote or a provisional vote.
postal voting	Postal votes are available for electors who cannot vote in person at polling places because of any of the reasons set out in schedule 2 of the CEO. The elector must make an application in writing for a postal vote and the application must be received by the relevant officer by 6 pm, on the day before polling day.
pre-poll voting	Pre-poll voting is available on the same grounds as postal voting. Pre-poll votes must be applied for and lodged in person.

**SUMMARY
and
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chapter 2 The Cost of Conducting Elections

The conduct of elections involves the costs of maintaining the organisation which conducts elections (infrastructure costs) as well as the cost of staging electoral events. It is difficult to isolate heads of expenditure and caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions and making comparisons on the basis of costs alone.

The Australian Electoral Commission's infrastructure costs are much higher than those of the States, reflecting the roll maintenance functions of the AEC and its staffing structure. The divisional office network maintained by the AEC adds considerably to its infrastructure costs. These costs are increased further by the need to maintain support structures for the divisional network in State head offices and the central office.

The divisional network provides a quality service to Federal voters. State and local government authorities also derive some benefits from the existence of the divisional network including advice for returning officers, polling officials and electors during State and local election periods.

There have been many studies of the divisional network over the years. All have recommended modifications but the network remains with few changes and none which alter its basic structure. Variations in the workload of different divisional offices are not reflected in their standardised staffing structures.

The Committee supports the continued operation of a permanent field structure but proposes that there be some rationalisation of offices in metropolitan areas. The rationalisation should be based on function rather than a formula. There should continue to be a dedicated Divisional Returning Officer for each electoral division. The benefits of an improved divisional network include cost savings, greater efficiency resulting from more flexible management, better service to the public and better career structures for AEC staff.

Recommendation 1. The Committee, in acknowledging the substantial infrastructure costs associated with the dispersed nature of the divisional network, considers that regionalisation/collocation in metropolitan and major provincial centres should proceed and recommends accordingly. (para 2.7.1)

Recommendation 2. The Committee further recommends that decisions relating to the number of divisions to be regionalised/collocated should not be limited to three as contemplated by the 1990 AEC study, but be considered in the light of costs, and of benefits and convenience to electors. (para 2.7.2)

Recommendation 3. In implementing regionalisation/collocation proposals, the Committee recommends that the AEC determine, in consultation with the Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union, the most appropriate staffing structure for regional/collocated offices, based on operational requirements and workload in each separate office. (para 2.7.3)

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the AEC in its consideration of regionalisation options also consider the extent to which head office costs can be reduced through the devolution of responsibility to regional personnel. (para 2.8.7.)

The Committee encountered great difficulty in comparing costs of conducting elections and referendums across the seven State/Territory and the Federal electoral administrations. Differing accounting and reporting requirements and practices made comparisons a problem. Nevertheless the terms of reference required an attempt to be made at presenting costs in a comparable way.

Relying on information provided by all Commissions/Electoral Offices and the advice of the statistics group in the Parliamentary Research Service, a large comparative table was compiled (see Appendix 4), and reference made to this table in this section of the report.

An average of the cost per elector for the last three electoral events, reveals a variation from \$6.20 (Northern Territory) to \$2.61 (South Australia). Federal elections cost more to run than those for all jurisdictions other than the Northern Territory. While this is explained partly by the more comprehensive service offered to Federal electors some cost elements need to be reconsidered. In particular election allowances paid to AEC staff should be reviewed. The need for AEC staff overtime and casual employment during election periods should also be examined.

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Government review, with the Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union, the appropriateness of maintaining separate election allowances for AEC staff. (para 2.15.6)

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the AEC review its current procedures for overtime and casual employment, particularly in periods of high demand such as election times. (para 2.15.11)

Chapter 3 Sharing and Saving

The second term of reference covers opportunities for further resource sharing which could lead to savings for Federal and State electoral bodies. Most of the suggestions relating to resource sharing were aimed at making voting more convenient for the public and at streamlining procedures.

State electors often apply to AEC divisional offices for pre-poll and postal voting facilities. To a lesser extent, would-be Federal electors apply to State Electoral Commissions for these facilities. The level of satisfaction they receive varies according to their home State and where they apply. Pre-poll voting for State elections at all AEC offices and for Federal electors at State Commissions would provide a better service for electors who expect to be outside their electorate or unable to vote on polling day. Applications should be processed expeditiously and procedures standardised where possible.

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to making pre-poll and postal voting for all State/Territory elections available at all AEC offices. (para 3.3.5)

Recommendation 8. The Committee further recommends that pre-poll and postal voting for Commonwealth elections be available at State/Territory Electoral Commission offices. (para 3.3.8)

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory Commissions take steps to standardise procedures and forms for pre-poll and postal voting. (para 3.3.11)

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends that, at future Commonwealth and State/Territory electoral events, the Commissions devote resources to make electors aware of the enhanced facilities for pre-poll and postal voting. (para 3.3.12)

Much inconvenience for electors at both State and Federal elections results from requests for information being denied on the grounds that electors have approached the wrong office.

Recommendation 11 The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to AEC staff being authorised and trained to respond to queries from the public about State/Territory elections. The Committee does not consider that payments from the State/Territory Commissions to the AEC should be necessary for this service. (para 3.4.3.)

Recommendation 12. The Committee recommends that similar arrangements be made so that State/Territory Electoral Commissions can respond to queries from the public about Commonwealth elections. The Committee does not consider that payments from the AEC to the State/Territory Commissions should be necessary for this service. (para 3.4.4.)

A further area in which a measure of standardisation between State and Federal administration would enhance voter convenience is that of polling places. As far as possible the same polling places should be used for all elections. A standardised layout would be convenient for electors.

Recommendation 13. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions standardise polling place locations wherever possible, in order to avoid public confusion. (para 3.5.2)

Recommendation 14. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions set up a working party to investigate the practicability of standardising polling place procedure and layout. (para 3.5.5.)

State and Commonwealth electoral administrations could share resources in order to enforce compulsory voting.

Recommendation 15. The Committee recommends that electronic scanning be used as widely as possible and the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions negotiate a standard rate of reimbursement for the use of the system. (para 3.6.2)

Recommendation 16. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions investigate the practicability and advantages of exchanging information about non-voters. (para 3.6.4)

Election audits offer opportunities for resource sharing which would ensure the highest standards of audit. Staff development opportunities would also follow from resource sharing in this area.

Recommendation 17. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to introducing joint panels for conducting audits of State/Territory and Commonwealth elections. (para 3.7.2.)

Electoral education and electoral research offer further fields of fruitful resource sharing between the Commonwealth and State electoral administrations. The results could be improved education programs, greater access to quality electoral research and cost savings.

Recommendation 18. The Committee recommends that programs of electoral education conducted by the AEC or the

State/Territory Commissions include material on all three levels of government. (para 3.8.5)

Recommendation 19. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions investigate the possibility of establishing jointly funded electoral education centres in each State/Territory capital city. (3.8.7)

Recommendation 20. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions investigate the desirability of joint research projects. (3.9.2)

Staff interchanges could provide benefits resulting from more experienced staff for both the AEC and the State Commissions. Some savings in in-house training could be expected.

Recommendation 21. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to developing a program of staff interchanges between the AEC and the State/Territory Electoral Commissions for periods of say, six months to one year. (para 3.10.4)

Recommendation 22. The Committee recommends that the AEC propose to the State/Territory Commissions that at the time of a State/Territory election, AEC staff might be seconded to the State/Territory Electoral Commission concerned and that at the time of a Commonwealth election, State/Territory staff might be seconded to the AEC. (para 3.10.7)

Recommendation 23. The Committee recommends that in addition to exchanges with AEC State/Territory head offices, secondments of State/Territory staff to the AEC's central office also be considered at election time. (para 3.10.8)

Recommendation 24. The Committee recommends that secondees be given duties commensurate with their qualifications and experience and be exposed to appropriate new areas of work. (para 3.10.9)

Some Divisional Returning Officers of the AEC acted as State Returning Officers in the most recent elections in Tasmania and Western Australia. It is possible that other States might wish to use DROs in this capacity if they could be guaranteed the availability of a certain number of DROs when needed. The benefits for States would be access to a well-trained and professional body of returning officers. The AEC would benefit from the experience gained by its staff. The current policy on this matter should be reviewed.

Recommendation 25. The Committee recommends that the AEC guarantee to provide an agreed number of staff to act as State Returning Officers. (para 3.12.6)

The States do not have access to permanent premises for their returning officers. In some states they operate out of their own homes and in other states premises are hired and furnished for the duration of the election period. The Committee considers that greater efficiency and cost savings would be afforded those States which used AEC offices as State premises during elections. If some reimbursement were made for the use of the offices and facilities this would result in cost savings for the AEC as well as for the State Electoral Commissions. Cooperation in the use of storage facilities, where practicable, would also be of mutual benefit.

Recommendation 26. The Committee recommends that where the AEC's offices are made available for use by State Returning Officers the States/Territory reimburse the AEC accordingly. (para 3.13.8)

Recommendation 27. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to establishing joint storage facilities in each State/Territory. (para 3.14.2)

Polling staff carry out comparable duties at Federal and State electoral events. Where specialised skills are used, such as scrutinising results in which proportional representation is involved, the use of the same staff is also highly desirable. Efficiencies would result from the AEC and the State Commissions employing the same polling staff and using local staff exchanges for specialised scrutinies.

Recommendation 28. The Committee recommends that staff of both the AEC and State/Territory Commissions be encouraged to work as polling staff at elections for the other level of government. (para 3.15.2)

Recommendation 29. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to developing a program of local exchanges of staff for scrutinies where proportional representation is involved. (para 3.15.4)

Recommendation 30. The Committee recommends that the practice of exchanging information about suitable polling officials be adopted between the Commonwealth and State/Territory Commissions. (para 3.15.6)

Recommendation 31. Where the performance of polling staff is satisfactory, the Committee recommends that the same staff be used for Commonwealth and State/Territory elections wherever possible. (para 3.15.7)

The Committee considers that there would be advantages in the permanent staff of the Commissions attending each other's training sessions for returning officers and polling officials.

Recommendation 32. The Committee recommends that the AEC invite staff of the State/Territory Commissions to attend training sessions for divisional staff and polling officials and that the State/Territory Commissions make a similar approach to the AEC. (para 3.15.9)

A single computerised program for paying polling officials could be used by the AEC and the States. The savings generated would benefit both the States and the Commonwealth.

Recommendation 33. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions set up a working party to investigate the practicability of using the one computerised system for the payment of polling officials. (para 3.15.11)

Chapter 4 A Single Body for Running all Elections?

The third term of reference required the Committee to gather evidence and deliberate on the possibility of establishing a single electoral body, and the benefits which might flow from the establishment of such a body.

There was support for the proposal from some Divisional Returning Officers who perceived the multiplicity of electoral administrations as wasteful, unprofessional and confusing for the public. There was also support for the concept of a single electoral body from local government representatives who considered their own electoral requirements could be fulfilled with greater efficiency. Other support

for the concept came from small political parties and an electoral reform group.

The main body of evidence was against the idea of a single body. The major political parties and the State Electoral Commissions/Offices saw constitutional and practical difficulties as barriers to the concept. AEC management did not favour the concept, but commented on the benefits which might flow if it were to become a reality.

Some of the problems cited as factors in favour of a single body can be solved by the resource sharing suggestions outlined in Chapter 3 of this report and some of the recommendations relating to the joint rolls in Chapter 6.

The Committee concludes that it is impractical to establish a single body to conduct all Federal and State elections.

Chapter 5 Maintaining the Rolls: Background to the Joint Rolls

The fourth term of reference, which was added at the request of the States in order to ensure that their concerns could be fully expressed during the inquiry, engendered more interest (and evidence) than any other aspect of the inquiry.

Although the terms of reference focus on the current methods and costs of maintaining the roll, most of the States considered that the evolution of the methods and costs is pertinent to the roll's current maintenance.

This chapter surveys the history of Commonwealth/State relations in maintaining the rolls, and traces the origins of a Federal electoral administration, now called the Australian Electoral Commission. The

advent of computerised rolls revolutionised the collection and storage of data, but required choices to be made between competing systems.

The system currently in use, the RMANS (Roll Management System) uses a centralised data base. All divisions are connected to RMANS with the exception of those in South Australia.

Chapter 6 Current Methods and Costs of Roll Maintenance

Calculating the costs of roll maintenance involved similar difficulties to those encountered in estimating the costs of conducting elections.

The AEC collects all the data for State and Federal electoral rolls. Some States rely on the AEC to provide them with State and local government rolls, while others take the raw data and use it for the compilation of a 'parallel roll' for State purposes.

Arrangements for the provision of elector data by the AEC to the State bodies are embodied in Joint Roll Agreements/Arrangements. Some of these arrangements are very much out of date, and in fact, predate the computer age. Following the Commonwealth's request for reimbursement from the States of fifty per cent of the direct costs of roll maintenance, several of the Roll Agreements/Arrangements are being renegotiated. In some cases the renegotiations have been postponed and are awaiting the outcome of this inquiry.

Several States are concerned with the definition of direct costs. Of particular concern is the large expense of the AEC's divisional network infrastructure, as the divisional offices collect the initial data for the rolls. The States see the network as an expensive luxury and do not want to contribute to its operations indirectly through roll maintenance charges.

The Committee supports the Commonwealth's initiative to claim half the direct cost of roll maintenance from the States, but considers that the AEC should negotiate with the States regarding the items to be defined as direct costs.

Recommendation 34. The Committee recommends that negotiations to conclude the current round of joint roll agreements should proceed without delay. (para 6.7.19)

Recommendation 35. The Committee recommends that negotiations occur between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories to determine an agreed formula for calculating direct costs of roll maintenance. (para 6.7.20)

Two aspects of roll maintenance which attracted some attention during the inquiry related to the degree of detail added to the initial compilation of the data and the 'building blocks' used in compiling the roll. The use of CCD (Census Collection Districts – an administrative unit used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics) boundaries in the redistribution process came under close scrutiny and was criticised by some States.

Recommendation 36. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State Commissions in Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania with a view to having the AEC align electors to wards and/or ridings or appropriate local government subdivisions. (para 6.13.5)

Recommendation 37. The Committee recommends that the use of CCD boundaries should be considered as an aid in the redistribution process, but notes that the requirement of relevant Acts demand that other criteria will be the determining factors. (para 6.13.8)

Considerable difficulties have arisen in relation to the accuracy of the roll. The AEC, as the provider of the product and service, is in a particularly vulnerable position vis-a-vis the States. Now that the States are being asked to pay a greater share of the costs, they are much more critical of the standard of the product. As the AEC is responsible for the production of the joint roll, AEC staff should ensure the greatest possible accuracy before State electoral events as well as in preparation for Federal elections. The AEC should reconsider its mechanisms for maximising roll accuracy in order to avoid some of the problems which have arisen in the past.

Recommendation 38. The Committee recommends that, subject to satisfactory arrangements regarding timing and funding, the AEC run the programs for the removal of duplications before all State/Territory electoral events. (para 6.14.5)

Recommendation 39. With regard to the errors brought to the attention of the inquiry, the Committee recommends that the AEC conduct a thorough review of its procedures giving particular attention to quality controls for the output of RMANS. (para 6.15.9)

Evidence on the methods and costs of the roll focussed on the consultation, or lack thereof, in the design and development of the computer program RMANS (Roll Management System). With hindsight it is easy to point out that the AEC should have been more aware that the roll is a joint Commonwealth/State product, and consulted with the States in its development. At the time of the development however, the AEC was bearing almost all the costs and could not foresee the 'user pays' era.

The time is now right for setting consultative mechanisms in place. The Committee considers that the committee established in Queensland to oversee the joint roll is a worthwhile model for other

States. The committees need not be limited to roll matters but could address general resource sharing matters.

Recommendation 40. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to setting up a joint management committee in each State/Territory. (para 6.17.6)

Recommendation 41. The Committee recommends that the terms of reference of the joint management committees include roll maintenance, resource sharing and the conduct of elections for the State/Territory concerned. (para 6.17.7)

Recommendation 42. The Committee recommends that the joint management committees consist of the Electoral Commissioner and the Deputy Electoral Commissioner or their respective nominees, and the Australian Electoral Officer and the Deputy Australian Electoral Officer or their respective nominees for the State/Territory concerned. (para 6.17.8)

In addition to establishing joint management committees for dealing with local issues, the Committee considers there is a need for an advisory council to oversee major policy issues regarding the methods and costs of maintaining the roll and to consider other matters of interest to the Commonwealth and the States. The Committee considered various models for such a council and concludes that an Australian Joint Roll Council could satisfy the States' need to have input to major policies concerning the roll. The Council should not displace the existing annual conferences of senior electoral officials.

Recommendation 43. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to

establishing an Australian Joint Roll Council (AJRC). (para 6.18.10)

Recommendation 44. The Committee recommends that the AJRC consist of the Electoral Commissioners from each State and Territory, the Australian Electoral Commissioner and the Deputy Australian Electoral Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner responsible for enrolment in the AEC. (para 6.19.5)

Recommendation 45. The Committee further recommends that, when an issue affects one State/Territory only, the Australian Electoral Officer concerned be coopted to the AJRC for that agenda item only. (para 6.19.6)

Recommendation 46. The Committee recommends that the terms of reference of the Australian Joint Roll Council include the development and maintenance of the joint roll and other electoral matters which have significance for more than one electoral administration. (para 6.20.3)

The Committee notes that, unlike most other policy areas, there is no formal meeting of Ministers responsible for electoral matters. A Ministerial Council would recognise the considerable State interests and financial involvement in the roll maintenance activities of the AEC. There are several matters which could be decided at Ministerial level including the composition of the Australian Electoral Commissioner

Recommendation 47. The Committee recommends that the Minister for Administrative Services approach his State/Territory colleagues to propose the establishment of a Ministerial Council on electoral matters. (para 6.21.3)

Recommendation 48. The Committee recommends that the Ministerial Council considers the desirability of an extra appointment to the Australian Electoral Commission to be filled by State/Territory Commissioners in rotation, and reviews this matter from time to time. (para 6.21.7)

The AEC concedes that competing demands on resources sometimes result in requests from State Commissioners not being given the priority required by the Commissioners. While the AJRC should alleviate many of the States' immediate concerns about input to, and control over their interests, in the joint rolls, a system of contracting with the AEC for the provision of some specific services is another mechanism which might avoid problems. This would give the States legal redress in the case of problems or non-performance.

Recommendation 49. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to setting out the arrangements for the provision of roll products to the States/Territories in formal contracts. These negotiations should occur in the context of a review of the Joint Roll Agreements. (para 6.22.3)

The Committee was exposed to much technical evidence regarding the nature and capabilities of RMANS. Some States and the AEC came armed with computer consultants arguing, amongst other things, the benefits of decentralised compared with centralised computer systems and vice versa. The Committee recognises that such matters require detailed study and analysis of a type not possible in the present inquiry.

Recommendation 50. The Committee recommends that the AJRC undertake an inquiry into the advantages of a centralised as against a decentralised database. (para 6.23.17)

Other evidence on the methods of maintaining the roll and ensuring its accuracy ranged from relatively simple matters, such as the speedy processing of claim cards and the more complex issue of the adequacy and costs of electoral roll reviews. The cost of 'cleansing' the roll should be shared by the States to the extent that they benefit from the reviews. The Committee considers that the complex matter of how best to maximise the roll's accuracy deserves further investigation and should be taken up by the proposed Australian Joint Roll Council.

Recommendation 51. The Committee recommends that the AEC make arrangements with State/Territory Commissions and State/Territory local government associations to ensure that completed electoral claim cards received by those authorities are delivered expeditiously to State/Territory AEC head offices or DROs. (para 6.25.6)

Recommendation 52. The Committee recommends that Section 92 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act be amended to allow more flexibility in the timing of Electoral Roll Reviews. (para 6.27.25)

Recommendation 53. The Committee recommends that where a review is timed to meet Commonwealth needs (for instance an election or a redistribution) the cost be carried by the Commonwealth. (para 6.27.26)

Recommendation 54. The Committee recommends that where a review is timed to meet State/Territory needs (for instance, an election or or a redistribution) the cost be carried by the State/Territory concerned. (para 6.27.27)

Recommendation 55. The Committee recommends that where a review is timed to meet Commonwealth and State/Territory

needs the cost be shared equally between the Commonwealth and the State/Territory concerned. (para 6.27.28)

Recommendation 56. The Committee recommends that consideration of alternatives to habitation reviews be undertaken by the proposed Australian Joint Roll Council (AJRC). (para 6.28.20)

In relation to the cost of roll maintenance, attention was drawn to the joint roll allowances currently paid to divisional staff directly by the States on a 'piecework' basis.

While not coming to a conclusion on this matter, the Committee considers that a review of these allowances should be undertaken by the AJRC.

Recommendation 57. The Committee recommends that a review of joint roll allowances be undertaken by the proposed Australian Joint Roll Council in consultation with the relevant union. (para 6.29.11)

Western Australia and Victoria maintain parallel rolls for some state purposes. South Australia has a joint roll with the Commonwealth which is maintained on the EAGLE system, and is not part of the national electoral roll. Other States manipulate the data received from the AEC for various State products such as jury lists.

There is a considerable amount of duplication of effort in the maintenance of parallel rolls, and the separate South Australian roll which could be saved if the AEC could meet the requirements of the States for State electoral rolls.

Recommendation 58. The Committee recommends that the AJRC give early consideration to the use of AEC facilities for

the production of all electoral rolls for State/Territory and local government election requirements throughout Australia, and that it advise the States/Territories of the results of its investigation. (para 6.30.17)

The Committee received some evidence on the possibility of limited interaction between RMANS and EAGLE. It would seem that if a useful link between the two systems is practical, this would contribute to the accuracy of the roll.

Recommendation 59. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the South Australian Electoral Commissioner with a view to interlinking RMANS and EAGLE so that interstate transfers can be adequately checked, matched and effected. (para 6.31.6)

The Committee hopes the inquiry was useful in canvassing a variety of matters and that the report will contribute to solving some of the problems which currently exist in the conduct of elections and roll management.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY

This was the first inquiry undertaken by the Committee which involved the States. The Commonwealth-State aspect was a major feature of the inquiry. Some of the main issues discussed did not arise directly from the terms of reference, but were a reflection of the relationship which has developed between the Australian Electoral Commission and the various State Commissions. The inquiry itself has had an impact on the relationship.

1.1 The State of Electoral Administration in Australia

1.1.1 The most encouraging aspect of the inquiry was that the evidence assumed the basic good health of Australian electoral administrations and processes. One witness observed quite correctly

... You should not lose sight of the fact that Australian electoral practitioners are held in high regard, both nationally and internationally, for their integrity, impartiality and professionalism.¹

1.1.2 While there was much debate about methods and processes, and accusations were exchanged about alleged errors and incompetencies, not one piece of evidence suggested that Australian elections are anything but fair and democratic. They may be inconvenient for some electors (and some electoral practitioners), but the outcomes are beyond doubt. Professor C Hughes, a former Australian Electoral Commissioner, made the following observation in this regard:

I do not think electoral matters are perceived as bad problems at present. There are fringe, peripheral, minor trifling problems that

¹ Mr C Phillips, Chief Electoral Officer, Northern Territory, Evidence p. 650.

annoy some people. It is not seen as a disaster area; to the contrary, it is probably seen as something that Australia, the Commonwealth and State, does pretty well, therefore not worrying anyone except a few practitioners in the middle of the action.²

1.2 The Committee's Approach to the Inquiry

1.2.1 It became obvious in the early days of the inquiry that some of the witnesses intended using the inquiry as a platform for furthering debates, particularly about the joint rolls, which were already underway. The Committee did not object to providing a forum for communication between the eight electoral administrations in Australia, even when the technical detail seemed beyond that required by the terms of reference. The Committee's task was compared with the labours of Hercules.³ One wonders how Hercules would have dealt with attempting to adjudicate between opposing teams of computer consultants!

1.2.2 The important matters which were the subject of the inquiry were not lost amidst conflict and one-upmanship. One witness informed the Committee (and his fellow practitioners):

... the franchise and the democratic process are too important to allow pettiness and parochialism to intrude into any discussion concerning their better management.⁴

1.2.3 The inquiry was marked by the great interest shown by AEC staff throughout Australia. Of the 105 submissions made to the inquiry, forty-five were from AEC staff, AEC staff associations or the union representing AEC staff members.

² Evidence, p. 485.
³ Evidence, p. 649.
⁴ Evidence, p. 666.

1.3 The Terms of Reference

1.3.1 The terms of reference of this inquiry are extremely wide-ranging but most attention was directed to the concept of a single electoral body and the maintenance of the rolls.

1.3.2 The suggestion of a single body to conduct all elections was perceived as a threat to existing electoral administrations. The reaction to the terms of reference has been colourfully expressed by Dr D Muffet of the Australian Electoral Commission:

I can tell you that when the Commission found out that this inquiry was on we nearly fell over because it was the last thing we wanted. It is a noble concept perhaps but I think it is going to be very difficult for people to sort out an answer that is going to be acceptable to everyone.⁵

1.3.3 The difficulty seen by Dr Muffet was perceived as an impossibility by the States. Their viewpoint can best be summed up by this observation from Mr A Becker, the South Australian Electoral Commissioner:

one of the most fundamental rights of a sovereign parliament is to determine the way in which it is elected.⁶

1.3.4 The inquiry was initially advertised with the first three terms of reference. Cooperation in the maintenance of the electoral rolls was subsumed into the second term of reference (on resource sharing). The fourth term of reference, which focussed on the rolls, was added to accommodate the States, which had particular concerns about both the methods and costs of maintaining the rolls.

⁵ Evidence, p. 286.
⁶ Evidence, p. 620.

1.4 Local Government in the Inquiry

1.4.1 The Committee gave consideration to the place of local government in the inquiry. It was recognised that local government elections are governed by State legislation, and therefore local government could be seen as a subset of 'State elections' and included in the terms of reference. The Committee was pleased to receive submissions from local government authorities and some representatives gave evidence in public hearings.

1.4.2 The huge number of local government authorities in Australia (about 800) made it impossible to collect evidence from even a representative sample of them, given the wide-ranging nature of the terms of reference as a whole. Where local government arose naturally in the course of the inquiry, evidence was taken and included in the final considerations.

1.5 Major Issues Raised during the Inquiry

1.5.1 Naturally many major issues were raised in an inquiry with such wide ranging terms of reference as this one. The issues which dominated the inquiry were well summed at the final public hearing in Canberra on 29 May 1992 in the following interchange:

Mr Phillips—The question then becomes: what can your Committee hope to achieve? I should like to be bold enough to make the following modest suggestions.

CHAIRMAN—We welcome all advice.

Mr Phillips—There is a need for much better and more frequent consultation between the various electoral administrations. There is potential for some rationalisation of the Commonwealth divisional structure in urban areas. There is little point in creating a monstrous body to be responsible for all elections in Australia. There are a number of practical and legal constraints inherent in this proposal...

There should be consultation on the possibility of achieving uniformity in enrolment and voting procedures to the fullest extent possible across the various jurisdictions. There should be an ad hoc committee with wide representation to develop a vision and consider options for a national roll maintenance system in Australia.⁷

1.6 Relevance to the Terms of Reference

1.6.1 Some matters raised in the submissions and public hearings took on an importance which exceeded their relevance to the terms of reference. The Committee allowed some leeway in the conduct of the inquiry by permitting a closer examination of some of these topics than was consistent with a strict interpretation of the terms of reference. There were things which, it seemed, needed to be said, and this inquiry seemed a natural platform. Issues such as the dispersed nature of the Australian Electoral Commission's divisional network, consultation between the Australian Electoral Commission and its State counterparts, and other matters relating to the joint rolls are examined here, where they can be seen in the context of the inquiry as a whole. They are explored in more detail in the body of the report.

1.7 The Divisional Network

1.7.1 Each of the 148 (soon to be 147) Federal electoral divisions is serviced by an Australian Electoral Commission divisional office, staffed by a Divisional Returning Officer and supported by two other staff. The divisional network of the Australian Electoral Commission has been the subject of investigations over many years. Most have focussed on whether each division needs its own office, or

⁷ Evidence, pp. 649-50.

whether the structure can be consolidated (regionalised) and streamlined in the interests of cost-effectiveness.

1.7.2 In December 1987 the Australian Electoral Commission published the result of its Efficiency Scrutiny into Regionalisation. This Committee reported on the AEC's efficiency scrutiny in its October 1988 report *Is this where I pay the electricity bill?* The Australian Electoral Commission management, this Committee and most other observers consider that some rationalisation of the divisional network would lead to greater efficiencies. The divisional staff and their union tend to support the status quo, but the Committee was pleased to note that the PSU is now prepared to consider some flexibility. Ms S O'Loughlin, for the Union, told the Committee:

It is not the PSU's position to say that the structure that the Australian Electoral Commission is currently operating is perfect or is the ideal.

and

I do not argue with the proposition that if there were changes made to the current structure in the Electoral Commission – to the divisional structure – that you would have a cheaper outcome.⁸

1.7.3 While not addressing the issue of cost-efficiency of the AEC's field structure, the union considers that it provides a good service to electors:

... in terms of ensuring that elections are conducted properly, that rolls are maintained correctly, and that the people who do the voting get a proper service out of their officials, I think that has to be brought very much to the forefront.⁹

⁸ Evidence, p. 388.
⁹ Evidence, p. 388.

1.7.4 The union's basic attitude to the debate on the divisional structure is that the issue has been dealt with in previous reviews and should not be analysed in this inquiry.¹⁰

1.7.5 The Government has deferred consideration of the matter. As Mr B Cox, the Australian Electoral Commissioner politely noted:

Proposals for a regional structure which have arisen from those considerations have been found to be unacceptable by government and, I think, by lots of Members of Parliament, too.¹¹

1.7.6 The Committee and several witnesses saw the network as inextricably linked to the costs of running elections and the methods and costs of maintaining the rolls. The Committee therefore agreed to admit evidence regarding the divisional network.

1.8 Consultation and the Electoral Rolls

1.8.1 A key issue for the States in this inquiry was the extent to which they were consulted in the development and maintenance of the electoral roll, and the extent to which it is a 'joint roll'. The evidence taken in regard to the rolls extended to considerable detail relating to the software, RMANS. It included whether the roll should be maintained on a centralised mainframe computer, on decentralised smaller computers, or indeed whether there should be a single roll as opposed to a decentralised database. Examples of real and alleged roll errors were received by the Committee on a regular basis. At times it seemed that each mail delivery brought forth a new set of challenges and claims. The validity of habitation reviews (now called Electoral Roll Reviews), the relevance of building blocks such as census

¹⁰ Evidence, p. 383.
¹¹ Evidence, p. 315.

collection districts (CCDs), and debate about who should produce secondary roll products were also aired at length.

1.8.2 The debate/controversy highlighted the sensitive position of the Australian Electoral Commission as the providers of a service, leading one AEC staff member to bemoan:

I must admit to a feeling of disappointment at the unfortunate and unjust tone of attack which has been adopted by States, *viz-a-viz* the Australian Electoral Commission.¹²

1.8.3 The AEC noted that a marked change in the attitude to the service was occasioned by a letter from the Prime Minister to the Premiers asking the States to pay fifty per cent of the direct costs of producing each State's electoral roll. The States did not deny that the cost of the product was a factor in how they regarded the roll. Just as in the commercial world, buyers seek value for money – a fact acknowledged by Mr I Dickson, the New South Wales Electoral Commissioner:

... the difficulty is that what is happening now is that we are being asked to virtually share the cost. I appreciate that perhaps it is still not a full share. It is ... almost equivalent to some of my State annual budgets. Obviously, the State government of the day is not going to accept that without some quid pro quo.¹³

1.9 The Impact of the Inquiry

1.9.1 The Committee has at times been concerned that the inquiry itself may have a negative impact on the relationships between the Australian Electoral Commission and its State counterparts. As Professor Hughes observed:

¹² Evidence, p. 886.
¹³ Evidence, p. 368.

... all of the spats tended to be documented and laid out to be seen. It is a bit like matrimonial proceedings – the worst sides of all the parties are immediately highlighted because of the particular circumstances.¹⁴

1.9.2 Some have seen the conflict as having some positive aspects. Mr D Farrell noted:

I see this inquiry, even with the angst that has arisen, as possibly being helpful in advancing this changed process of greater accountability. It is hurting a little; the tensions are here.¹⁵

1.9.3 Mr M Heyward from the Liberal Party of Australia presented the Committee with a tall order:

... this inquiry ... has been useful if for no other reason than it has brought the Australian Electoral Commission and the various State electoral bodies together to discuss a number of matters which have been around for a while. I hope that this Committee will be able to help resolve some of the problems that have existed in the relationship between the various electoral bodies.¹⁶

The Committee can only echo the sentiment and reply 'We hope so too'.

¹⁴ Evidence, p. 492.
¹⁵ Evidence, p. 666.
¹⁶ Evidence, p. 573.

CHAPTER 2

THE COST OF RUNNING ALL FEDERAL AND STATE ELECTIONS

At first glance, the first term of reference of this inquiry, which requires the Committee to ascertain the cost of running all Federal and State elections, would appear to be a relatively simple matter. But the task of obtaining that data proved to be more difficult than expected, particularly as election costs necessarily include the cost of maintaining the organisations responsible for the conduct of those elections.

All electoral authorities depend upon having lists of persons eligible to vote; under various agreements between the Commonwealth, the States and the Northern Territory, it is the Federal administration, the AEC, which collects and maintains that information nationally.

To perform this task the AEC has an extensive field structure which impacts upon its ongoing annual costs. The existence of this permanent field structure assumed some importance during the course of the inquiry. The structure is used by the Commonwealth for the conduct of Federal elections, for roll maintenance and for the delivery of programs of public education at the local level. These multiple responsibilities of the field structure have resulted in Commonwealth election costs becoming 'fuzzy' around the edges. It required some effort to separate the two, with no guarantee of accuracy.

The variations in costs incurred by the Commonwealth and States, both in maintaining their organisations and conducting elections, are referred to in this chapter.

2.1 Infrastructure Costs

2.1.1 During the course of the inquiry it became apparent that there are two separate aspects to the cost of conducting Federal and State elections. While costs can be identified and attributed to specific electoral events there are ongoing infrastructure costs in maintaining the organisations responsible for managing those events. It is not surprising therefore, that many submissions and witnesses focused on

the differences in infrastructure costs incurred by the AEC and State Commissions.

2.1.2 The information on costs provided to the Committee was qualified by warnings of the difficulties in isolating particular heads of expenditure and the consequent dangers of comparing costs with those of other bodies. Care should be exercised in assessing the figures in this section of the report.

2.2 Elements in Infrastructure Costs

2.2.1 The infrastructure costs and staffing levels of the AEC and the State Commissions for the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91 are set out in Table 1. For comparative purposes the costs of conducting industrial and miscellaneous elections are not included. Not all Commissions are involved in that activity. Some, for example the AEC, provide this service free of charge, whilst others recover full costs.

2.2.2 The direct cost of electoral roll reviews and the cost of effecting electoral redistributions have also been excluded from Table 1, as these events occur at irregular intervals and would distort annual comparisons if they were included.

TABLE 1: Annual infrastructure costs (excluding cost of industrial and miscellaneous elections, electoral roll review activities and redistributions). The information is extrapolated from numerous submissions from all Commissions.

Jurisdiction	1989-90 \$'000	1990-91 \$'000
Commonwealth	48 375	51 410
NSW	1 558	1 932
VIC	1 908	1 780
QLD	1 023*	1 159*
SA	1 287	1 526
WA	1 995**	1 715**
TAS	517	614
NT	422	480
TOTALS	57 085	60 616

* Employer superannuation contributions not included.

** Includes extraneous elections.

2.2.3 While the contrast between the Commonwealth and State infrastructure costs appears startling, it should be noted that the Commonwealth costs include constructing the rolls for all three levels of government. In addition, the Commonwealth's infrastructure includes a divisional network which is not matched by the States. All electoral bodies experienced difficulties in isolating infrastructure costs from other costs but agreed to estimate such costs in order to assist the Committee to address its terms of reference.

2.3 Staffing as an Element in Infrastructure Costs

2.3.1 The annual infrastructure cost of maintaining AEC operations is approximately five times greater than the annual aggregate infrastructure costs of the State Commissions.

2.3.2 There is a direct relationship between ongoing infrastructure costs and the staffing levels of the organisations responsible for the conduct of elections. Details of numbers of staff engaged by the various electoral commissions as at 31 January 1992 are shown below in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Electoral Commission staffing levels as at 31 January 1992 (including staff involved in the conduct of industrial and miscellaneous elections).

Jurisdiction	Staffing
Commonwealth	
- Central office	102.5
- State Head offices	191.5
- Divisional offices	457.8
NSW	34
VIC	22
QLD	22*
SA	15.5
WA	33.5
TAS	14
NT	7
TOTAL	899.8

* Possible staffing following establishment of Queensland Electoral Commission.
Information supplied by the relevant Commissions.

2.3.3 It is the AEC's field staff or permanent divisional structure which primarily sets it apart from the State and Northern Territory electoral administrations. As at 31 January 1992 there were 457.8 full-time equivalent staff engaged in 148 divisional offices throughout Australia. To maintain this permanent network, further permanent support staff are engaged in both the AEC's State head offices and at its central office in Canberra.

2.3.4 It is not just the numbers of field staff which cause the relatively high staffing levels in the AEC compared with the State electoral bodies. If the divisional staff are excluded from Table 2, the AEC's staff numbers total 294. The AEC's State head offices alone have 191.5 staff members, which is considerably more than the total numbers in all State Electoral Commissions combined, which total 148.

2.3.5 The Committee is aware that bald comparisons are often misleading. The numbers reviewed in this section reflect some differences in functions between the States and the AEC. The AEC collects the raw data for the electoral rolls – a task which is not undertaken by the States. In addition the AEC's staff numbers reflect the high level of activity in conducting ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) elections, and a greater number of industrial elections than the States. Even taking into account the different functions the AEC does seem to be generously staffed in relation to the States. Consultants engaged by the States and the AEC are not included in the staffing figures.

2.3.6 Almost 50 per cent of the AEC's annual infrastructure cost is absorbed in the payment of salaries and wages and related payments. In 1989-90 and 1990-91 these payments totalled \$22.9 million and \$24.1 million respectively. A breakdown of these costs is shown in Table 3:

TABLE 3: AEC annual staffing costs.¹

AEC Offices	1989-90 \$'000	1990-91 \$'000
Central Office	3 054	3 345
Head Offices	5 894	5 941
Divisional offices	13 954	14 842
Total	22 902	24 128

2.4 The Divisional Network: An Overview

2.4.1 The AEC's divisional network attracted more attention than any other single issue relating to infrastructure costs. Witnesses from the State electoral bodies often stressed that the extensive field structure of the AEC caused them great concern because the network was an integral part of all AEC operations including roll maintenance. It has to be conceded that some structure is needed to maintain the rolls. The issues are canvassed in more detail in Chapter 6. The network was seen by the States as a reason for caution in further resource sharing with the AEC. State electoral practitioners are clearly apprehensive that in a 'user pays' environment, their treasuries could be required to indirectly subsidise the divisional offices. The current structure of the divisional network and its future directions became an important element in the submissions, the public hearings and the Committee's deliberations. The focus on the network during the inquiry is reflected in the prominence given to the topic in this chapter.

2.4.2 For the financial year 1990-91 the total staffing cost of the AEC's divisional offices amounted to almost \$15 million and property/accommodation costs were almost \$6 million. If the cost of State head office and central office support were taken into account,

¹ Compiled from Evidence pp. S448, S449 and S457.

together with other costs such as freight, communication and computer networking, the total cost of the divisional network was probably of the order of \$30 million in 1990-91; that year being a non-election year.

2.4.3 On average, each divisional office has three permanent staff members whose principal duties are to maintain continuous rolls, prepare for the conduct of parliamentary elections, organise electoral roll reviews and deliver electoral information to groups of primary and secondary school students. About fifteen years ago there was an average of four staff in each divisional office, and by 1987 this had levelled off to about three and a half per office, including support by Head Office Area Managers.²

2.4.4 Over the last two decades considerable thought and attention has been directed towards the necessity of maintaining a nexus between the number of Members of the House of Representatives and the number of separate divisional offices.

2.4.5 In December 1987 the AEC undertook an investigation and assessment of a proposal to group divisional offices into regions. The report of that investigation entitled 'Efficiency Scrutiny into Regionalisation' was subsequently the subject of an inquiry by this Committee, which on 24 November 1988 tabled a report in the 35th Parliament. That report *inter alia*, recommended that regionalisation of the Australian Electoral Commission's divisional offices only occur in metropolitan areas. The regional offices should be formed by the combination of up to three divisional offices.

2.4.6 On 1 June 1989 the Parliament was advised that the Government had decided to defer consideration of that recommendation.

² AEC Efficiency Scrutiny into Regionalisation, 1987, p. 9.

2.4.7 In the AEC's 1987 report reference is made to an earlier inquiry undertaken in 1974 for its predecessor, the Australian Electoral Office. That inquiry was undertaken by the management consulting firm of W D Scott & Co Pty Ltd, which advocated in its summary of principal findings:

Most Divisional Offices should be given more working area and in certain cases better premises. The flat organisational structure imposed by the dispersed Divisional Office should be challenged and wherever possible replaced by a system of Regional Offices.

2.4.8 The report of W D Scott & Co Pty Ltd entitled, 'Review of the Structure, Systems and Facilities of the Australian Electoral Office - November 1974', (commonly known as the 'Scott Report'), elaborated its findings at paragraph 8.1 by reporting:

In this Chapter we propose the establishment of a system of Regional Offices, restricted initially to the metropolitan areas. These offices would not be simply a grouping together of Divisional Offices, working separately, but a joint office where four or five DROs would be under the control of a Regional Manager who would have sufficient support staff to service all the operational requirements of the joint office.

2.4.9 In 1983, some nine years after the Scott Report was prepared, the Australian Electoral Office engaged another firm of management consultants, Price Waterhouse Associates Pty Ltd to report upon alternative approaches to meet the AEOs' information processing needs. In its May 1983 report, Price Waterhouse stated in its covering letter:

The only way of providing adequate [computer] backup at an economic cost is to group the equipment for several Divisional Offices into one location, such as a Regional Office. This approach would be likely to offer cost savings in addition to the added security of the provision of backup.

We therefore would see considerable advantage in the concept of a Regional Office replacing several Divisional Offices, and recommend that this approach be pursued – if the legal and any other constraints so permit.

2.4.10 In February 1984 the Australian Electoral Commission was established to replace the Australian Electoral Office. During the period Nov-Dec 1985 a team of AEC staff undertook a detailed review of divisional offices. One of the terms of reference of this review was 'to evaluate the appropriateness of current organisational arrangements'. In relation to this matter the review team reported at paragraph 7.2 of its subsequent report:

The need to maintain a Divisional Office in each electorate in non-election periods must be questioned, if only on cost effective grounds.

and

The review team found that the 1974 Scott Report recommendation that Divisional Offices be regionalised was still an emotive issue despite assurances from management that regionalisation was not being considered. It was put to the review team in several forums that proposed co-location of Divisional Offices was the thin end of the wedge and would lead to regionalisation. The co-location issue was the subject of industrial dispute during the course of the review. The review team considers that the Scott concept of Regional Offices has much to commend it. The problems identified by Scott in 1974 can be found today: Divisional Offices remain small, isolated units; there is still a lack of mobility and career structure.

2.5 The Divisional Network: Functions and Activities

2.5.1 The relationship between the functions of the network and the AEC's costs is fundamental. Notwithstanding the

government's decision to defer consideration of whether regionalisation should proceed, the Committee notes that in the foreword to the AEC's 1990-91 Annual Report, Mr Cox, observes:

There are, however, limits to the extent to which a small organisation can carry an increasing workload with diminishing resources. A particular problem which faces the Commission in *trying to meet this challenge is the limit placed on its flexibility by its peculiar structure: about 60 per cent of our staff work in 148 isolated, three-person Divisional Offices.*

It has become increasingly clear that a review of the Commission's structure is needed if it is to be able to absorb further diminution of resources. Work on this has commenced. Structural review must, however, include the divisional area of the Commission.

2.5.2 Whilst it might impose administrative difficulties for the AEC, the DRO network provides a service for the conduct of some State and local government elections and this service could well be extended.

2.5.3 In Tasmania, for example, DROs are used exclusively for the conduct of Assembly elections. In Western Australia, five DROs were used as Assembly returning officers during the last election, and all DROs in that State are authorised to issue pre-poll and postal votes. At the most recent Western Australian State election DROs issued approximately 6 000 pre-poll votes representing about 30 per cent of the State total.³

2.5.4 In South Australia all DROs are authorised to issue pre-poll and postal votes for electoral events in that State. This facility is widely advertised in South Australia and results in the majority of such votes being issued through these outlets.⁴ DROs in Queensland

³ Evidence, p. 58.

⁴ Evidence, p. 652.

and Victoria, although not authorised to issue pre-poll votes, are all equipped to issue postal vote applications for Queensland and Victorian elections. A number of submissions strongly urge that these facilities be extended Australia-wide, and this report deals with these matters in Chapter 3.

2.5.5 In the absence of an ongoing and continuous responsibility for roll maintenance activities, State Commissions have understandably adopted a practice of engaging temporary returning officers for the conduct of their elections.

2.5.6 In New South Wales and Victoria, these temporary returning officers are required to establish and occupy public offices throughout an election period. In other States, temporary returning officers operate from a conglomeration of premises including courthouses, private business premises and places of residence. In Tasmania where Commonwealth DROs are appointed as temporary State Returning Officers, arrangements are made for them to operate from their DRO offices. Irrespective of the arrangements made at the State level there is considerable evidence that the AEC and their DROs provide a valuable support mechanism during State elections. In some States DROs provide State Returning Officers with information, advice and in some instances office equipment to assist them in the performance of their duties.

2.5.7 In Victoria, for example, the DRO for the Division of Bruce asserted:

The important thing is that many of the temporary (State) returning officers lean on the DROs; they work for the DROs at Federal elections as officers in charge of polling places, in some cases just as an ordinary polling official. So they lean on the DRO and the DRO has always been happy to offer advice.⁵

⁵ Evidence, p. 290.

2.5.8 The DRO for Hunter, Mr D Avery, suggested that at each State election, DROs provide a 'hidden benefit to the State' in that elector and returning officer advice is provided free of charge.⁶

2.5.9 These hidden benefits extend to the training of polling and other officials involved in the conduct of elections. The extent to which each level of electoral administration relies upon another for the training of its officials, was highlighted by the New South Wales Electoral Commissioner:

So polling official error did occur, but in general they would be the same polling officials as were used by the Commonwealth and were trained by the Commonwealth and were trained, of course, by my returning officers.

Obviously training of polling officials is an important area and I do appreciate that the Commonwealth has a very good system of training. Most of them are also State polling officials.⁷

2.5.10 Irrespective of whether the State Commissions have entered into formal arrangements for DROs to assist electors during the conduct of their respective electoral events, there is a clear public perception that such a service should be available, while the DRO network retains its present public profile. In those instances where DROs are not equipped to deal with State election enquiries, this unnecessarily frustrates electors and has an adverse affect of the image on electoral administration generally.

2.5.11 Elector expectation of DROs during State electoral events is heightened by the fact that the location of temporary State Returning Officers is not generally known until the election is advertised. In New South Wales where temporary returning officers

⁶ Evidence, p. 390.
⁷ Evidence, p. 377.

are required to establish public offices, it is unusual for the same offices to be available for succeeding elections.

2.5.12 As far as New South Wales is concerned, this feature of their arrangements may not present a continuing problem, as that State has now legislated for fixed term Parliaments. However, in other jurisdictions, where there is uncertainty in the timing of elections, the publication of returning officer locations will probably continue to be delayed until after elections are announced.

2.5.13 Irrespective of the arrangements made by the States, the Committee concludes that DROs and their staff will continue to feature in the conduct of State elections. This is supported by a number of submissions and in evidence obtained during the course of the inquiry.

2.5.14 As an indication of the number of enquiries received by DROs during the conduct of State elections, the DRO for the Division of New England, New South Wales, had this to say in his submission:

During the period of the 1991 [NSW] State Election, this office received 1 100 enquiries on State matters alone. Enquiries regarding enrolment and other matters within our authority but pertaining to that election would more than double that number. The recent Local Government Elections produced a similar number of enquirers.⁸

2.5.15 This evidence was supported by the initial submission of the AEC which stated that during the election in question an average of 850 telephone calls and 400 counter enquiries were experienced by each division in New South Wales over a surveyed period of fifteen working days.⁹ In a supplementary submission, the Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia advised that for the daylight

saving referendum held in Western Australia in April 1992, AEC staff answered 17 330 public enquiries.¹⁰

2.5.16 Even more revealing is a statistical summary provided by the Australian Electoral Officer for Queensland which shows that during the February 1992 Queensland referendum, DROs and the head office of the AEC in that State dealt with approximately 24,000 telephone enquiries and 10 000 counter enquiries.¹¹

2.5.17 A further breakdown of this summary indicates considerable variations in the assistance rendered by particular divisional offices. For example, at the lower end of the scale, one division had no contact with State electors and at the other, the collocated divisions of McPherson and Moncrieff handled 4000 phone and 1 300 counter enquiries.

2.5.18 Evidence was received that the time taken to process enrolments can also vary depending on the geographic nature of a division. In country areas, where addresses are less specific, considerable time can be taken to ensure that electors are correctly located on the database to enable accurate rolls to be produced.

One of the unique problems in a country division is trying to identify where people are. That is our main job. We are there to maintain the electoral roll and maintain it accurately.

The people who work in Kennedy and some of those divisions may spend five times the length of time that I might [in] determining the exact location of a particular elector. That certainly is a resource problem that has to be accounted for.¹²

⁸ Evidence, p. S12.
⁹ Evidence, p. S243.

¹⁰ Evidence, p. S734.
¹¹ Evidence, p. 618.
¹² Mr M Lamerton, DRO for McPherson, Evidence, pp. S554-55.

2.5.19 Variations in workloads in divisional offices can also result from differences in the numbers of electors in those divisions and elector mobility. These factors do not appear to have been given adequate consideration in the staffing of divisional offices.

2.5.20 Statistics are not available to indicate the number of enquiries received by State Commissions during Federal electoral events. Suffice to say however, that as the AEC has a far greater number of permanent offices it would be reasonable to assume that AEC staff deal with many more State enquiries than vice versa.

2.5.21 Evidence was obtained in New South Wales and Queensland that local government authorities also look to the DROs for advice, information and polling booth equipment to assist them with the conduct of their elections. For example in his submission, the City Manager of the Parramatta City Council stated:

Council has always maintained a close liaison with the Australian Electoral Commission through its various Divisional Offices and has, at times, received the utmost cooperation, together with professional and efficient service.¹³

2.5.22 In evidence the Deputy Clerk of the Caboolture Shire Council also indicated that the local DRO was an important source of information.¹⁴

2.5.23 DROs also contribute towards the development of AEC policy and procedures and the manuals which document those procedures. Since the JSCEM report in 1988 of its inquiry into the AEC's regionalisation proposals, DROs have contributed towards the preparation of a 'Divisional Office Procedure Manual' and an 'Election Procedures Manual'.

¹³ Evidence, p. 360.

¹⁴ Evidence, p. 527.

2.5.24 While most evidence supported the view that staff in divisional offices have a reasonable work load even at non-election times, not all witnesses agree with this view. Mr L Laragy, who had recently acted as a DRO, told the Committee:

Outside [election times], there is a degree of preparation for elections and there is the post election work that has to be done. So it really depends on how much time there is between elections as to what sort of activities occur during the quieter time. Of course, we have habitation reviews which keep the divisional staff very busy, but when those activities are not being funded, then the work does dry up.¹⁵

2.6 The Divisional Network Reviewed

2.6.1 Leaving aside the question of whether separate and dispersed divisional offices are required for the purposes of roll maintenance, a proposition challenged by several witnesses, the compelling question is whether the present network is required for the conduct of Federal elections, for the delivery of electoral education programs and for participation in AEC policy and procedure development. That issue is complicated by the fact that there is an undeniable perception and need in the electorate for immediate access to a convenient avenue of information and advice whenever a Federal or State election is announced. As indicated earlier, this is often not immediately available at State elections, other than from the headquarters of the respective State Commissions.

2.6.2 The electoral education function is of particular value and is an area that could not easily be covered in the absence of a field network. The materials available to Divisional Returning Officers for

¹⁵ Evidence, pp. 303-04.

school use are of a high quality but appear to be under-utilised in some divisions.

2.6.3 The JSCEM's 1988 report contemplated the establishment of regional offices in metropolitan areas which would be responsible for the activities currently performed by up to three divisions. At paragraph 5.36 of that report it is observed:

The Committee's view is that in any metropolitan Regional Office there should be officers at either the Administrative Service Officer (ASO)4, ASO 5 or ASO 6 level who are responsible for specific Divisions on a continuing basis and that they be designated as Divisional Returning Officers for their respective Divisions.

2.6.4 While some submissions and evidence suggest that for the purposes of roll maintenance, the network is costly and unnecessary, the Committee does not accept that its abandonment would enable satisfactory arrangements to be made to service elector expectations and needs during election periods, whether they be Federal or State.

2.6.5 Numerous AEOs and senior Commonwealth and State officials supported the concept of regionalising the divisional network, mostly on the grounds of cost effectiveness and better utilisation of resources.¹⁶

2.6.6 Whilst most DROs support the status quo, this is by no means universal:

....I don't necessarily agree the present level of resources scattered across the country is the most cost effective way of providing an electoral service. I also don't believe all divisions were created or

¹⁶ Mr W Eaton, Deputy AEO South Australia, Evidence, pp. S83-85. Mr I Spencer, AEO South Australia, Evidence, p. 180. Mr D Farrell, Evidence, p. 70. Dr D Muffet, AEO Victoria, Evidence, p. 278. Mr B Nugent, AEO New South Wales, Evidence, p. 447. Mr C Phillips, CEO Northern Territory, Evidence, p. 159. Mr B Young, AEO Western Australia, Evidence, p. 203.

remain equal. Differences in workloads may occur due to factors such as location and redistributions.

The three person divisional office should not be considered sacrosanct. Some divisions need more, others possibly less although it is unlikely that a division could operate efficiently with less than three people. The siting of divisional offices several kilometres apart in metropolitan cities just for the sake of it is ridiculous. Co-location despite many shortcomings may be one option in these cases. Some functions like enrolment processing may be shared to enable better utilisation of resources in other areas.¹⁷

2.6.7 In giving evidence this witness acknowledged that there is no need to set an upper limit on the number of divisions operating out of a single premise but stressed the need for 'unrelenting vigilance' during election periods to ensure proper separation of activities, for example security of ballot papers and declaration votes.

2.6.8 With few exceptions Federal divisions contain a significantly greater number of electors than State electoral divisions, necessitating the establishment and staffing of more polling booths. This has a flow-on effect on provisioning and training requirements, the counting and recounting of ballot papers, and the follow-up of multiple and non-voters.

2.6.9 However, the Committee is not convinced that Divisional Returning Officers need to have a permanent presence in each division. It is noted that several divisions are presently collocated. One such office was visited during the course of the inquiry. That office, located at Hobart, Tasmania catered for the divisions of Denison and Franklin, and both DROs believe the arrangement is functioning well.

¹⁷ Mr M Lamerton, Evidence p. S123.

2.6.10 The Committee pursued the question of regionalisation with representatives of the Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union at its public hearings in Sydney on 14 May 1992. This issue brought the following response:

We have never been against collocation in principle. There is that current situation where the divisions of Bradfield and North Sydney are both having problems with their own locations. There has been a proposal to collocate them at Chatswood. As long as the individual structure is maintained so that there is an individual returning officer with a responsibility for a particular electorate, I do not think we would have any particular problem with that. We have never been against it in principle.¹⁸

2.6.11 As the regionalisation proposals recommended by the JSCEM in 1988, proposed that specific officers continue to have a responsibility for single divisions on a continuing basis, it would appear that the union's current attitude is not at odds with the earlier recommendation.

2.6.12 The AEC advised¹⁹ that it had reconsidered proposals for regionalisation/collocation in 1990 in the light of amalgamating two or three metropolitan divisions. That study suggested that the 106 metropolitan divisional offices could be amalgamated into forty offices, with three divisions in each of twenty-six offices and two divisions in each of fourteen offices. Accommodation savings were estimated at 8% for two division offices and 17% for three divisional offices resulting in overall annual savings of approximately \$378 000. Other economies in the provision of computer facilities and other office equipment could also be expected from this configuration. Staff savings could also be expected

2.6.13 The AEC also reported that regionalisation/collocation would result in a better career structure, economies from consolidation of work, greater flexibility in operational arrangements, potential for specialisation and a greater ability to cope with staff absences. This, the AEC added, would improve head offices' control of operations and improve communication and training arrangements.

2.6.14 The Victorian Electoral Commissioner pointed out that 68% of the divisional offices in Victoria are located in the Melbourne metropolitan area. He added:

When one considers that the driving time between some of these clusters is in the order of five, 10 or 15 minutes, in my view one really has to ask questions as to why such a structure exists for an organisation in the 1990s.²⁰

2.6.15 In the light of all the evidence, the Committee concludes that although the AEC incurs significant annual infrastructure costs in maintaining the divisional network, that network is of good quality and highly differentiated in the services provided. That is not to say that there needs to be a separate office in each Federal division. On the contrary, the Committee concludes that there would be worthwhile benefits from regionalisation/collocation in metropolitan and major provincial centres. Whilst it is not proposed to identify which provincial centres should be targeted for regionalisation/collocation, areas such as the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Newcastle and Wollongong in New South Wales and Geelong in Victoria, provide examples of the Committee's thinking.

2.6.16 The Committee further concludes that regionalisation/collocation should not merely bring together several divisions, operating as separate entities, but should involve a restructuring of activities and take into account variations in workload.

¹⁸ Evidence, p. 389.
¹⁹ Evidence, p. S591.

Although there should continue to be a permanent DRO for each division, in a regionalised structure it should be possible to organise responsibilities according to workloads and functional requirements.

2.6.17 Functions which might be so organised include roll management, election preparation and public education. Greater specialisation in these areas should produce higher quality outputs.

2.6.18 Alternatively, a hierarchical structure may be appropriate with, for example, existing Head Office Area Managers being shifted to a regional office. Conversely it may be appropriate to locate a number of divisions within a State head office, thereby enabling divisional staff to gain exposure to a wider range of duties and responsibilities. In either event the Committee would expect savings to result from staff restructuring that should be possible in shared premises.

2.6.19 The amalgamation and restructuring of the AEC's field presence should also improve the flexibility of organisational arrangements, enable improved career structures to be developed and, with proper management, reduce infrastructure costs.

2.7 The Divisional Network – Recommendations

2.7.1

Recommendation 1. The Committee, in acknowledging the substantial infrastructure costs associated with the dispersed nature of the divisional network, considers that regionalisation/collocation in metropolitan and major provincial centres should proceed and recommends accordingly.

2.7.2

Recommendation 2. The Committee further recommends that decisions relating to the number of divisions to be regionalised/collocated should not be limited to three as contemplated by the 1990 AEC study, but be considered in the light of costs, and of benefits and convenience to electors.

2.7.3

Recommendation 3. In implementing regionalisation/collocation proposals the Committee recommends that the AEC determine, in consultation with the Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union, the most appropriate staffing structure for regional/collocated offices, based on operational requirements and workload in each separate office.

2.8 The AEC's State Head and Central Office Structure Compared with State Structures

2.8.1 As indicated earlier, a large component of the AEC's annual infrastructure cost is related to the maintenance of its State head offices. Table 2 (page 13) indicates that as at January 1992 there were 191.5 full-time equivalent staff based in these offices. In 1990-91 salary payments to staff in head offices totalled almost \$6 million. It is noted that in the same year the cost of accommodating head office staff was approximately \$3.5 million (Table 4 p. 36). The staffing costs should also be compared with the roll maintenance costs attributed to staffing in Table 9 p. .

2.8.2 By way of comparison it is noted that the total number of staff engaged by the various State Commissions totalled 148 which is less than the number of staff engaged by the AEC in its State head offices. Furthermore the total infrastructure costs of the State Commissions in 1990-91 was approximately \$9.2 million.

2.8.3 This comparison prompted the Committee to question the need for the AEC to maintain such extensive structures at the State level, bearing in mind that it has a Canberra-based contingent of 102.5 full-time equivalent staff. This issue was also brought into sharp focus in several submissions. For example, the Electoral Reform Society of South Australia stated:

From our experiences, currently [State] electoral departments are very lean, efficient bureaucracies and yet very helpful in providing service to the public.²¹

2.8.4 More specifically, on the subject of AEC State head offices a DRO had this to say:

²¹ Evidence, p. S102.

...it is essentially the removal or relocation of middle management functions which do not contribute to the value added service... Put simply, there is no longer a need for the AEC to have people gathering, transmitting and interpreting data, or coordinating local operations.²²

2.8.5 In response to questions on the role of State head offices, the AEC advised that in addition to conducting industrial elections, a function also performed by some State Commissions, staff in those offices are responsible for management of the joint rolls, for participating in AEC policy, for planning electoral events, for arranging contracts with suppliers, managing non-voter processes, for example following up non-voters, conducting Senate scrutinees and managing the divisional network.²³

2.8.6 In concert with the Committee's recommendation for restructuring the divisional network, the question obviously arises as to whether restructuring should also occur at head office level by the devolution of responsibility to regions. In this respect it may be possible for the larger regional offices to be provided greater authority for day-to-day operations, for staffing, for election and event planning etc. While the Committee would not wish to suggest any limit on devolution in authority and responsibility, it does consider that this matter should be fully explored by AEC management in collaboration with its staff.

²² Mr R Williams, Acting DRO for Brisbane, Evidence, p. S164.
²³ Evidence, pp. S602-03.

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the AEC in its consideration of regionalisation options also consider the extent to which head office costs can be reduced through the devolution of responsibility to regional personnel.

2.9 Data Collection and Infrastructure Costs

2.9.1 In February 1991 the Prime Minister wrote to the State Premiers/Chief Minister (except South Australia and Queensland) indicating continuing support for the joint roll arrangements but pointed out that the Commonwealth was bearing a disproportionate share of the cost. He added that in an endeavour to rectify this imbalance, the Minister for Administrative Services had been asked to arrange for officers of the AEC to undertake appropriate negotiations with State Commissioners.²⁴ South Australia was not approached, as the joint roll arrangement in that State had been updated in 1988. In Queensland negotiations were already proceeding and a new agreement in that State was signed in November 1991.

2.9.2 Although negotiations were in various stages of progression at the commencement of this inquiry, the Western Australian Electoral Commissioner, acting on behalf of the States, advised the AEC by letter of 7 February 1992 that negotiations should be deferred until the JSCEM had completed its inquiry and reported to the Parliament. This position was taken by the States 'in view of the fact that significant reform proposals will be placed before the JSC

regarding its fourth term of reference [regarding methods of maintaining the rolls].²⁵

2.9.3 Joint forms for enrolment in all States are available at over 3 000 post offices throughout Australia. The AEC pays about \$250 000 per annum to Australia Post for this service.²⁶ The States do not contribute towards that expenditure.

2.10 Property and Office Services

2.10.1 The AEC's infrastructure costs include a substantial component attributable to the cost of property and office services. For 1989-90 and 1990-91, these costs were \$11.3 million and \$10.8 million respectively. In both years more than 50 per cent was directly related to the offices occupied by divisional returning officers and their staff. A breakdown of property and office services costs is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: AEC property and office costs.²⁷

AEC Offices	1989-90 \$'000	1990-91 \$'000
Central office	1034	1297
Head offices	3895	3519
Divisional offices	6381	5978
Total	11310	10794

²⁴ Evidence, p. S561.

²⁵ Evidence, p. S231.

²⁷ Compiled from Evidence, pp. S448-65, attachment of an AEC submission showing the cost of property and officer services.

2.11 Cost of Elections – Problems of Comparisons

2.11.1 In an endeavour to obtain comparative election costs, information in a common format was requested from the AEC and State Commissions relating to the last three elections held in their respective jurisdictions for the period ending December 1991.

2.11.2 Information was not requested on payments associated with public funding of election campaigns as the Committee did not consider that an evaluation of these arrangements fell within the inquiry's terms of reference. In any event, public funding is presently limited to Federal and New South Wales elections.

2.11.3 Because of the diversity of Treasury and internal accounting arrangements observed by those administrations, the division of expenditure into the categories requested could not confidently be provided in many instances. For example the AEC advised:

The Commission's accounting structure is based on the categorisation and aggregation of individual transactions reported in the Appropriation and Revenue ledgers maintained by the Department of Finance. Some of the items in the categorisation requested can not be provided as either no separate records within this structure have been kept by the Commission or the particular items have not been charged separately by the Commission's suppliers.

and

The breakdown requested by the Committee has provided some difficulties in that it includes both functional and project categories that are not necessarily mutually exclusive.²⁸

2.11.4 In evidence the South Australian Electoral Commissioner told the Committee:

We have recently been asked to provide costings for the Committee. Not one of us [the States] sets our costings up in that manner [as requested by the Committee]. The cost of doing that particular exercise was quite significant. I understand that Canberra [the AEC] is even having trouble trying to fit it in ...²⁹

2.11.5 As a consequence of these difficulties some administrations resolved to provide their best estimates of expenditure; others provided aggregate actuals covering two or more descriptive expenditure lines.

2.11.6 The cost of elections are not always brought into account in the year of those elections. Expenditure is frequently incurred months or even years prior to an election in the restocking of forms and materials and the purchase of unprinted ballot paper etc. With the universal requirement of having to process non-voters, expenditure also continues to be incurred well after an election. While some administrations maintain continuous and separate records of all expenditure attributable to an election, irrespective of the year of that election, others do not.

2.11.7 In view of the limitations and caveats placed upon costing information supplied, caution must be exercised in any attempt to interpret data under each head of expenditure. That is not to say that comparisons have absolutely no validity. To the contrary, as the major portion of election expenditure is brought into account in the year of an election, the gross cost of each event would seem to be reasonably accurate. This therefore enables calculations to be undertaken to compare average cost incurred for each elector on the roll in question.

²⁸ Evidence, pp. S440-41.

²⁹ Evidence, p. 127.

2.11.8 Appendix 4 sets out the costs incurred by expenditure component, as provided by each administration. Total expenditure shown in this Appendix has been divided by the number of electors on a roll for the relevant electoral event, to reveal an average gross cost per elector. This figure has then been adjusted to exclude expenditure on election advertising, as that expenditure tends to distort comparisons and to a large extent is discretionary in nature.

2.11.9 As a measure of the distortion created by the inclusion of advertising expenditure in unit elector cost comparisons, it is noted that at the November 1989 South Australian election, advertising accounted for 21.5 per cent of gross expenditure; at the December 1989 Queensland election the comparable figure was 17.8 per cent and at the October 1990 Northern Territory election, the comparable figure was 4 per cent.

2.11.10 Having arrived at a net average cost per elector, a further adjustment has been made on Appendix 4 to convert these figures to December 1991 prices. For this purpose, the seasonally adjusted gross non-farm product index was applied. The bottom line shows these seasonally adjusted prices. They are repeated in Table 5 in descending order of magnitude.

TABLE 5: Cost per elector excluding advertising expenditure.
(compiled from Appendix 4 which is extrapolated from information provided by all electoral administrations).

Jurisdiction	Year of Election	Cost per elector (seasonally adjusted to Dec qtr 1991)
NT	1990	\$6.46
NT	1987	\$5.93
*Federal	1984	\$4.34
Federal	1987	\$4.16
*NSW	1991	\$4.14
VIC	1988	\$3.95
NSW	1988	\$3.82
WA	1989	\$3.66
Federal	1990	\$3.49
VIC	1985	\$3.26
WA	1983	\$3.11
QLD	1983	\$3.06
NSW	1984	\$2.96
SA	1985	\$2.86
TAS	1986	\$2.71
QLD	1989	\$2.71
WA	1986	\$2.69
VIC	1982	\$2.68
SA	1989	\$2.61
TAS	1989	\$2.59
QLD	1986	\$2.51
*SA	1982	\$2.36

* Held in conjunction with a referendum.

2.11.11 To further clarify the relationship between election costs incurred by the various jurisdictions, the average cost per elector in

each of those jurisdictions for the last three elections are shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6: Comparison of average cost per elector in each jurisdiction over their last three elections (excluding advertising expenditure).

Jurisdiction	Average cost per elector (seasonally adjusted to Dec qtr 1991)
*NT	\$6.20
Federal	\$4.00
NSW	\$3.64
VIC	\$3.30
WA	\$3.15
QLD	\$2.76
*TAS	\$2.65
SA	\$2.61

* Calculated on last two elections as costs of last three elections not provided.

2.11.12 Referendums were held in conjunction with the Commonwealth elections in 1984, the New South Wales elections in 1991 and the South Australian elections in 1982. As separate figures showing additional expenditure incurred on these events were not requested, it would be inappropriate to estimate the impact those costs may have had on the unit cost per elector shown above. Suffice to say that total additional costs associated with *conjoint referendums and elections* (other than perhaps advertising costs, which have been ignored in the compilation of the table) would not have assumed sufficient magnitude to invalidate the comparisons as shown. This conclusion is based on the premise that additional referendum costs would mainly result from additional printing and perhaps the employment of additional staff to assist at the scrutiny and count of voting papers.

2.11.13 There are, however, other factors which have an impact on these comparisons. For example, while the AEC provides A-Z certified lists of electors at each ordinary vote issuing table, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia provide split lists at these tables. This latter practice minimises the cost of certified list production and in those jurisdictions where the AEC's electronic roll scanners are used to detect non-voters and multiple voters, the cost of scanning is also minimised.

2.11.14 In New South Wales and Victoria, the State Commissions require their returning officers to lease and occupy a public office during election periods. In New South Wales these premises are occupied for a period of approximately seven weeks surrounding polling day, whilst in Victoria the period is approximately eight weeks. At the most recent New South Wales and Victorian elections the cost of hiring returning officer premises totalled \$576 000 and \$284 000 respectively.³⁰

2.11.15 As mentioned earlier, State Commissions engage, on retainer, temporary returning officers for the conduct of their elections. The election fees paid to these officers and the cost of their offices, where such costs are incurred, are included in the election costs supplied by State Commissions. These costs are included in the average cost per elector in the above table.

2.11.16 At Federal elections, DROs and their staff continue to occupy their permanent divisional offices. For the purposes of comparison the AEC provided information indicating that for the 1984, 1987 and 1990 elections the notional costs attributable to salaries and allowances paid to DROs, their permanent staff and costs associated with their accommodation during the election periods (issue of writs to declaration of polls), amounted to \$2.566 million, \$3.417 million and

³⁰ Evidence, pp. S1030, S1036.

\$4.373 million respectively.³¹ By adding those sums to the total cost of the 1984, 1987 and 1990 Federal elections (excluding advertising costs), the revised cost of those elections are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7: Federal election costs including DROs (excluding advertising).

Election	Total cost including DROs but excluding advertising \$'000	Average cost per elector excluding advertising	Constant Dec 1991 prices
1984	30 707	\$3.11	\$4.73
1987	37 562	\$3.63	\$4.57
1990	39 791	\$3.73	\$3.92

2.11.17 In comparing Federal and State election costs it should be noted that States' costs do not include the notional value of information services provided by AEC staff at both divisional and head office level. Similarly Federal election costs do not include costs incurred by State Commissions in dealing with Federal election enquiries. In this respect the South Australian Electoral Commissioner advised that for the purposes of the 1990 Federal elections a team of five temporary officers were engaged to staff a telephone answering service.³²

2.12 Impact of Different Procedures on Costs

2.12.1 the AEC's costs for Federal elections also include the costs of providing voting facilities to electors in the Antarctic and at numerous overseas diplomatic missions.

³¹ Evidence, p. S586.
³² Evidence, p. 624.

2.12.2 On the other hand it would seem that there are opportunities for economies of scale associated with the conduct of Federal elections not available to the States. Such areas include advertising and training packages.

2.12.3 In New South Wales and Victoria it has been the practice to staff each ordinary vote issuing table with two polling officials. The cost associated with this arrangement is a major component of the total election costs incurred by those States. In evidence, the New South Wales Electoral Commissioner had the following to say on this matter:

On the question of two polling officials to a table, again I have optional preferential voting systems as against the full preferential voting in the Commonwealth. I am quite often accused, both in New South Wales State elections and in local government elections, of the ability of polling officials to be able to interfere with the ballot paper where there is optional voting. In other words, if there is only a 1 on the ballot paper, they reckon that they can put the 2 on or the 3 or the 4 or the 5. The only way I can have some sort of substantiation of that is to have one bloke watching the other.³³

2.12.4 As ordinary voters are not required to hand their completed ballot papers to issuing officers, the Committee is not convinced that election security is markedly enhanced by placing two such officers at every ordinary vote table. In this respect the Acting New South Wales Electoral Commissioner advised that had only one polling official been used at each issuing table, the resultant savings would have been \$1.6 million in 1988 and \$2.0 million in 1991.³⁴ These savings would have reduced the cost of these elections (excluding advertising costs) to \$9.542 million and \$12.856 million respectively; average cost per elector (excluding advertising costs)

³³ Evidence, p. 363.
³⁴ Evidence, p. S510.

would have been \$2.69 and \$3.54 respectively. Converted to December 1991 prices these per elector costs are \$3.26 and \$3.59 respectively.

2.12.5 The Victorian Electoral Commissioner advised that the polling booth staffing structure used at the 1988 State election will be modified to require only one polling official to be in attendance at each vote issuing table in 1992. Had these revised arrangements been in place in 1988, the cost of that election would have been reduced by \$536 116.³⁵ As a result the average cost per elector would have been \$3.28 or \$3.72 converted to December 1991 prices (excluding election advertising).

2.13 Training

2.13.1 In relation to expenditure on the training of polling officials it is noted that the AEC spent \$1 108 000 during the March 1990 election, representing 10.4 cents per elector. At the May 1991 New South Wales election comparable expenditure was 2.1 cents per elector and at the December 1989 Queensland election it was 5.7 cents per elector. Numerous submissions and evidence suggested that training of polling officials by the AEC is better structured and more comprehensive than that provided by some State Commissions.

2.13.2 In pursuing this assertion the Committee took the opportunity to discuss Victorian training arrangements with officers of the State Commission following the Melbourne public hearings on 10 March 1992. Manuals and training videos prepared by that Commission were subsequently provided and were considered to be of good quality, well structured and comprehensive. Evidence was received in New South Wales from an officer-in-charge of a polling

³⁵ Evidence, p. S728.

booth who has worked at both Commonwealth and State elections in that State. In comparing training arrangements this witness said:

As regards the training of polling booth staff, I am convinced that the manuals supplied by the Australian Electoral Commission are far superior to the instructions to polling booth staff distributed by the State office.³⁶

2.13.3 When asked about the extent of instruction provided by the State he answered:

An hour, if you are lucky and all verbally.³⁷

2.13.4 Further evidence on this subject was obtained from the President of the New South Wales Institute of [State] Returning Officers. When questioned about the nature of training provided to officers-in-charge of polling booths, the following comment was recorded:

You have a training session for your seniors in the week before polling day. They are given the handbooks, and it is a case of getting as much knowledge over to them as possible.³⁸

2.13.5 In view of the disparate nature of this evidence, the Committee concludes that there is considerable variation in the quality of training provided by State Commissions.

2.14 Northern Territory Needs

2.14.1 Any attempt to compare Northern Territory election expenditure should consider the logistics involved in organising an

³⁶ Evidence, p. 456.

³⁷ Evidence, p. 457.

³⁸ Evidence, p. 411.

election in that Territory. In this respect it is noted that a significant proportion, 33.6% in 1987 and 22.4% in 1990 of total expenditure is attributed to the extensive use of mobile polling booths. At the March 1987 elections there were 33 static polling places and 117 mobiles. This increased to 51 static and 232 mobiles at the October 1990 elections.

2.15 Election Allowances and Payments

2.15.1 The impact of the divisional network on the cost of conducting elections has already been noted. These costs are increased further by election allowances paid to the three staff members in each divisional office during Federal elections.

2.15.2 DROs and their staff continue to receive normal salaries and overtime during Federal electoral events. The allowances currently payable are as follows:

TABLE 8: Divisional staff election allowances.³⁹

Divisional Returning Officers	\$1329
Asst DRO/Clerk	\$ 532
ASOC 2	\$ 330
Average total per Division	\$2191

2.15.3 Staff who work in a divisional office for part of an election receive part of the allowance. The amount payable is determined having regard to the length of time worked during the

election and the workload responsibilities relevant to the particular period worked.

2.15.4 By extrapolating the average election allowance paid per division across Australia, it is noted that total outlays could be as high as \$324 000 (3.3 cents per elector).

2.15.5 The Committee has not had the opportunity to examine this evidence in detail, nor to obtain the views of interested witnesses on election allowances. As these payments are a significant cost at election time, the Committee believes that this question deserves further consideration by the Government.

2.15.6

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Government review with the Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union, the appropriateness of maintaining separate election allowances for AEC staff.

2.15.7 Overtime paid to staff in divisional offices during election periods is also worth noting in the context of the cost of elections. In Victoria for example at the 1990 Federal election, overtime payments to DROs ranged from \$3 680 to \$7 753 (average \$5 233). Overtime payments to Assistant DROs/Clerks ranged from \$362 to \$3 827 (average \$2 778) and overtime payments to divisional office assistants ranged from \$630 to \$3 580 (average \$1 574). Assuming these figures represent the norm, an extrapolation suggests that total overtime payments to all divisional staff would have been of the order of \$1.4 million for the 1990 election (13 cents per elector). This figure may in fact be understated as the actual overtime payments to

³⁹ Evidence, p. 5987.

divisional staff at the 1987 Federal elections totalled \$1.53 million (source: *Efficiency Scrutiny into Regionalisation Dec 1987, Volume 2 Attachment 20*).

2.15.8 It is significant that in the AEC's report of its efficiency scrutiny, the following comment appears in relation to overtime worked in divisional offices:

When an election is announced, an initial allocation of overtime is made to each Division. This ranges from 300-400 hours per Division, depending on the State. Use of overtime is monitored by Area Managers, but Divisions are usually able to obtain additional allocations, providing the DRO can demonstrate a genuine need. In practice, most Divisions work about 400-550 hours overtime; some require more because of particular circumstances, such as a high volume of postal votes.

2.15.9 Bearing in mind that one of the main advantages of having permanent divisional returning officers is to enable them to maintain a state of readiness for elections, it is difficult to understand why there are such marked variations in the quantum of overtime worked in divisional offices during election periods.

2.15.10 If the volume of work to be performed after the issue of election writs can not be performed by existing staff resources without working excessive overtime, then the engagement of additional temporary staff should be considered to assist during these periods.

2.15.11

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the AEC review its current procedures for overtime and casual employment particularly in periods of high demand such as election times.

CHAPTER 3

SHARING AND SAVING

Opportunities for further resource sharing which could lead to savings for Federal and State electoral bodies

This area of the Committee's deliberations has the potential to be of great benefit to voters.

The facilities provided to voters should be cost-effective. Resource sharing should ensure ease of access for voters, particularly those who travel about Australia, so that they may cast a valid vote in Federal, State and local elections.

This chapter considers the barriers which currently exist between would-be voters and the ballot box – procedures which cause confusion to voters and/or polling staff – and a range of other areas in which further cooperation could be fruitful.

3.1 Resource Sharing and Cost Saving

3.1.1 Many possibilities for resource sharing have been put before the Committee. The great majority would result in savings to a greater or lesser extent. There follows a discussion of each suggestion. Attention is drawn to particular instances where savings could be considerable.

3.2 Resource Sharing and Relationships

3.2.1 The fact that the work of the AEC and the State Commissions is very similar in a great number of respects gives rise to extensive opportunities for resource sharing. The evidence contains a

number of instances where resource sharing is already taking place with some degree of success.

3.2.2 Resource sharing requires a high degree of trust and sound interpersonal relationships. However, the inquiry has revealed that aspects of the relations between the AEC and the State Commissions are strained. This has limited the opportunities for resource sharing.

3.2.3 The point might also be made that resource sharing and joint projects are a well recognised means of improving relations between agencies and promoting mutual understanding, provided that the necessary level of goodwill is present. Nevertheless the Committee remains of the view that increased resource sharing between the AEC and the State Commissions, in addition to resulting in savings in costs, is also likely to promote greater harmony between the agencies concerned.

3.3 Pre-poll Voting and Postal Voting at State Elections

3.3.1 In South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania (House of Assembly only) AEC staff issue pre-poll votes for State elections in the State concerned. In most other States applications for postal votes are available in AEC offices within the State concerned.

3.3.2 Interstate pre-poll voting for State elections generally takes place in the head offices of the State Electoral Commissions. Tasmania makes no arrangements for interstate pre-poll voting. Victoria has pre-poll voting at AEC offices in Cairns, Townsville,

Nambour, Southport and Canberra. Western Australia and the Northern Territory have pre-poll voting at AEC offices in Canberra.¹

3.3.3 It would add to the convenience of electors if pre-poll voting were available for State elections at all AEC offices.² The following accounts describe the situation in the AEC's divisional offices at the time of a State election:

I have seen frustration upon the faces of members of the public, who after calling at either the post office or the local council office and being redirected to the local AEC office, to be told 'No we don't handle pre-poll voting here. We are not conducting this election. You need to call at the temporary office of the State returning officer...'³

At the 1985 and 1988 State elections we had the farcical situation of the State Electoral Office employing casual staff, and with the agreement of the AEC, stationing them at divisional offices specifically to redirect thousands of electors away to their temporary State offices. The situation was extremely annoying to the general public, but equally, it was frustrating to all Divisional Returning Officers because they were unable to provide a proper electoral service. I believe it is an unacceptable situation for a Divisional Returning Officer to redirect the general public to a duplicated service at the temporary headquarters of part-time returning officers...⁴

It is my observation that electors generally are not aware of the intricate demarcations between Commonwealth and State electoral laws and indeed State and Commonwealth functions. It would not seem unreasonable to assume that if an elector saw an AEC office in Cairns, Colac or Cannington he or she would think that facilities would be available for voting.⁵

¹ Evidence, pp. S118, S245, S354.

² Mr M Lamerton, Evidence, p. S121.

³ Mr I Jones, DRO for Parramatta, Evidence, p. S57.

⁴ Evidence, p. S15.

⁵ Mr B Young, AEO for Western Australia, Evidence, p. S52.

3.3.4 Pre-poll voting for State elections at all AEC offices would provide a greatly enhanced service for electors who expect to be outside their electorate or unable to vote on polling day. The extent of the need for the facility is revealed by the fact that approximately 98 000 electors cast a pre-poll vote interstate at the 1990 Commonwealth election.⁶ There would be many more intrastate pre-poll votes. Such an arrangement would be relatively simple to administer. Moreover the AEC's on-line equipment would mean that details of enrolment, such as the correct State electorate, could be checked on the spot. Even if the number of votes taken at some AEC offices was relatively small, the Committee is of the opinion that the service should be provided. The Committee considers that the current situation in most States where AEC staff need to refer inquirers on to a State office is most undesirable.

3.3.5

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to making pre-poll and postal voting for all State/Territory elections available at all AEC offices.

3.3.6 It is highly desirable that, once an application for a postal vote is received, the ballot-papers are despatched as expeditiously as possible. Otherwise electors may be disenfranchised in the few days before polling day. Delays may also mean that electors about to travel overseas or to remote parts of Australia are disenfranchised. Accordingly it is important that the ballot papers are despatched from the office where the application is received and that local offices are able to accept such applications. The Committee notes that such

⁶ Evidence, p. S246.

arrangements already apply Australia-wide at Commonwealth elections.

3.3.7 For similar reasons the same arrangements should apply for Commonwealth voters at State Electoral Offices.

3.3.8

Recommendation 8. The Committee further recommends that pre-poll and postal voting for Commonwealth elections be available at State/Territory Electoral Commission offices.

3.3.9 The Committee also considers that pre-poll and postal voting for State elections should be available at State Electoral Commission offices in all States, thus extending the facility to Tasmanian electors.

3.3.10 If these recommendations are to be taken up, it is highly desirable that procedures for Commonwealth and State pre-poll and postal voting be standardised.⁷ It is recognised that certain aspects of these procedures are set by legislation. However others are not.

3.3.11

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory Commissions take steps to standardise procedures and forms for pre-poll and postal voting.

⁷ Evidence, p. S22.

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends that, at future Commonwealth and State/Territory electoral events, the Commissions devote resources to make electors aware of the enhanced facilities for pre-poll and postal voting.

3.4 Information about Commonwealth and State Elections

3.4.1 As well as proposing that pre-poll voting and postal voting for State elections be available at AEC offices, several submissions argue that AEC officers should be authorised and trained to provide information to the public about State elections.

At the last Queensland State election in December 1989 this office was, for all intents and purposes, the electoral inquiry service for the Gold Coast. For several weeks prior to polling day, hundreds of people every day either rang or came to our office seeking advice on the election...Once again the only thing we could do was provide the phone numbers and locations of the six [State] returning officers.⁸

3.4.2 Most of the inquiries which are directed to electoral offices are relatively simple. It is highly desirable that such inquiries be responded to on the spot. The practice of referring people from one office to another should be avoided.

Recommendation 11. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to AEC staff being authorised and trained to respond to queries from the public about State/Territory elections. The Committee does not consider that payments from the State/Territory Commissions to the AEC should be necessary for this service.

3.4.4

Recommendation 12. The Committee recommends that similar arrangements be made so that State/Territory Electoral Commissions can respond to queries from the public about Commonwealth elections. The Committee does not consider that payments from the AEC to the State/Territory Commissions should be necessary for this service.

3.5 Polling Places

3.5.1 Submissions and witnesses have raised the question of the inconvenience caused by variation in polling place location from Commonwealth election to State election and vice versa.⁹ The Committee recognises that in a few cases differing electoral boundaries will give rise to the need for such variation.

⁸ Evidence, p. S125.

⁹ Evidence, pp. S22, S192, S425.

3.5.2

Recommendation 13. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions standardise polling place locations wherever possible, in order to avoid public confusion.

3.5.3 Polling place layout and procedures vary among the States and between the States and the Commonwealth. Variations include A-Z rolls or split rolls and different envelopes and forms. These can on occasions be confusing to some electors.¹⁰

3.5.4 Some variations in procedure arise from differing legislation. However many do not.

3.5.5

Recommendation 14. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions set up a working party to investigate the practicability of standardising polling place procedure and layout.

3.5.6 It has been suggested that there might be savings if the Commissions were to jointly purchase cardboard polling place equipment such as screens and ballot-boxes as there would be 'lower unit prices based on longer production runs and more regular purchase requirements'.¹¹ The Committee does not support this proposal.

¹⁰ Mr N Pember et al, Evidence, pp. S96, S98.

¹¹ Mr R Williams, Evidence, pp. S179. Hon G Gallop, Evidence, p. S261. Mr A Becker, Evidence, p. S322.

Volumes are very large in any case and the need for warehousing, in some cases for as much as three years, would be likely to obviate any savings made in purchase costs. As the former Australian Electoral Commissioner has said:

One of the major considerations in the adoption [of cardboard voting screens and ballot-boxes] was elimination of long term storage costs and, so far as practicable, a single delivery from factory to distribution point. The unit cost savings on larger runs would be small considering the size of current runs, and I wonder whether an underlying consideration is not a wish to restore the certainty of having all election materials in existence and assembled well before an election is called.¹²

3.6 Enforcement of Compulsory Voting

3.6.1 The AEC's electronic scanning of the certified lists for the purposes of identifying non-voters and multiple voters is well accepted by a number of States.

3.6.2

Recommendation 15. The Committee recommends that electronic scanning be used as widely as possible and the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions negotiate a standard rate of reimbursement for the use of the system.

3.6.3 It might be possible for the AEC and the State Commissions to exchange information about non-voters, especially those whose reason for not voting is accepted as valid. Such an

¹² Professor C Hughes, Evidence, p. S428.

exchange of information would assist in identifying persistent offenders who are not fined. Any exchange of such information would need to comply with Commonwealth and State privacy requirements.

3.6.4

Recommendation 16. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions investigate the practicability and advantages of exchanging information about non-voters.

3.7 Auditing of Elections

3.7.1 A number of submissions suggest that the AEC's system of auditing elections might also be used at State elections.¹³ Under this system teams of staff from other States and other areas of the AEC audit individual elections with respect to matters such as declaration votes, informal ballot papers and the payment of polling officials. Electorates to be audited are selected by a draw from a hat with some constraints to ensure that there is at least one from each State and at least one which uses remote polling. Experience in the AEC is that the audits improve the accuracy and efficiency of elections. Their very existence is likely to lead to greater care being taken by electoral officials. Joint audit teams made up of officials from the AEC and the States would provide opportunities for the staff to learn from each other and to develop a better understanding of other electoral administrations.

¹³ Mr B Cullen, DRO for Wannon, Evidence, p. 388, Mr D Delmo, DRO for Kooyong, Evidence, S106, Professor C Hughes, Evidence, p. 8429.

3.7.2

Recommendation 17. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to introducing joint panels for conducting audits of State/Territory and Commonwealth elections.

3.8 Electoral Education

3.8.1 During the course of the inquiry the subject of electoral education was addressed as a possible field for resource sharing.¹⁴ The AEC suggested that a unified effort in electoral education could be a benefit of a single electoral body.¹⁵

3.8.2 The AEC is responsible for extensive programs of electoral education. These include visits by Divisional Returning Officers to schools and TAFE institutions and campaigns at career fairs, tertiary orientation weeks, youth expositions, shopping centres and local shows. The AEC has also developed a significant body of curriculum material for secondary schools and has established electoral education centres in Canberra and Melbourne. The AEC is responsible for the Commonwealth's Aboriginal and Islander Electoral Information Service (AIEIS).¹⁶ State involvement in electoral education varies from virtually nothing to programs similar to the AEC's.¹⁷

3.8.3 There is considerable variation in the extent to which the AEC's programs cover State electoral matters. Coverage of local government is limited in most cases. There is also some doubt as to the

¹⁴ Evidence, pp. S261-62, S322, S355.

¹⁵ Evidence, p. S228.

¹⁶ Evidence, p. S228.

¹⁷ AEC, Evidence, p. 228. Victorian Electoral Commission, Evidence, pp. S355. Western Australian Electoral Commission, Evidence, pp. S261-62.

authority of the AEC to include State and local government material. The reverse situation applies to programs of electoral education conducted by the State Commissions.

3.8.4 It is highly desirable that all three levels of government be covered. Such coverage could be accompanied by cost sharing which would result in overall savings.

3.8.5

Recommendation 18. The Committee recommends that programs of electoral education conducted by the AEC or the State/Territory Commissions include material on all three levels of government.

3.8.6 The electoral education centres set up in Canberra and Melbourne by the AEC and in Perth by the Western Australian Electoral Commission and funded jointly have been successful.

3.8.7

Recommendation 19. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions investigate the possibility of establishing jointly funded electoral education centres in each State/Territory capital city.

3.9 Electoral Research

3.9.1 The Electoral Commissioner for New South Wales has suggested that the AEC might provide an electoral research service for

both levels of government.¹⁸ An example which has already been completed is the *Conspectus of Commonwealth and State electoral legislation*. Such a service would depend upon suitable cost sharing arrangements being negotiated between the AEC and the State Commissions.

3.9.2

Recommendation 20. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions investigate the desirability of joint research projects.

3.10 Staff

3.10.1 The Committee discussed with witnesses the benefits of staff interchanges, and was informed that such interchanges were desirable and useful, but that the needs and characteristics of the individuals involved are crucial ingredients to the success of interchanges.¹⁹ The benefits are the mutual exchange of expertise between the sending and receiving agencies and a greater variety of work experience for the officers concerned. Interchanges can also assist in the development of mutual understanding between agencies.

3.10.2 Mobility of staff is not a characteristic of either the AEC or the State Electoral Commissions. Promotions and transfers to or from other government agencies or outside government employment are infrequent. This is especially the case for the divisional staff of the AEC. This lack of mobility is an additional argument for a well developed program of interchanges between the AEC and the State Commissions.

¹⁸ Evidence, p. S68.

¹⁹ Dr R Bell and Mr B Nugent, Evidence, p. 596.

3.10.3 There have been cases of such interchanges in the past. However, given the arguments for them and the great similarities of the work of the Commissions, they have been surprisingly few. The Committee is of the view that, in the longer term, interchanges are likely to promote cooperative working relationships between the AEC and the State Commissions and assist in overcoming the problems of consultation which have become apparent through the evidence taken by this inquiry.

3.10.4

Recommendation 21. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to developing a program of staff interchanges between the AEC and the State/Territory Electoral Commissions for periods of say, six months to one year.

3.10.5 A common arrangement for such interchanges is for the sending agency to continue to pay salary and for the receiving agency to bear costs such as travel, accommodation and overtime. Provided that the interchanges are balanced, such an arrangement results in costs being shared equitably. It is suggested that such an arrangement be considered by the AEC and the State Commissions when the details of interchanges are being negotiated.

3.10.6 Interchanges are especially valuable at election time. Provided that the staff concerned are experienced and capable, it seems to the Committee that this is a particular way in which the Commissions can assist each other. Interchanges in the state capital cities would keep costs to a minimum. There are a number of instances of such interchanges having taken place in the past, for instance in

Western Australia where state staff have assisted with roll closes in AEC offices.²⁰

3.10.7

Recommendation 22. The Committee recommends that the AEC propose to the State/Territory Commissions that at the time of a State/Territory election, AEC staff might be seconded to the State/Territory Electoral Commission concerned and that at the time of a Commonwealth election, State/Territory staff might be seconded to the AEC.

3.10.8

Recommendation 23. The Committee recommends that in addition to exchanges with AEC State/Territory head offices, secondments of State/Territory staff to the AEC's central office also be considered at election time.

3.10.9

Recommendation 24. The Committee recommends that secondees be given duties commensurate with their qualifications and experience and be exposed to appropriate new areas of work.

²⁰ Evidence, p. S264.

3.11 Returning Officers – The Current Situation

3.11.1 The Commonwealth has a permanent full-time Divisional Returning Officer for each House of Representatives electorate. In periods between electoral events, the prime task of these officers is the maintenance of the electoral roll. Other duties include election preparation and electoral education. For the Senate, the returning officer is the Australian Electoral Officer for the State or Territory concerned.

3.11.2 The States appoint returning officers for each electorate. An exception is the Northern Territory where there is one returning officer for all of the divisions of the Legislative Assembly.

3.11.3 In most cases State Returning Officers are engaged for the election period only. At other times they are paid a retainer. Appendix 5 shows the current scale of payments to returning officers in each State. Different arrangements apply in Tasmania and for the Legislative Councils of New South Wales and South Australia. The boundaries of the electorates of the Tasmanian House of Assembly are the same as those of the House of Representatives and the Divisional Returning Officer is appointed as the returning officer for State purposes.²¹ A member of the permanent staff of the State Electoral Office is appointed as returning officer for each of the three or four elections for the Tasmanian Legislative Council which take place annually. The State Electoral Commissioner is the returning officer for the Legislative Council in New South Wales. A member of the permanent staff of the State Electoral Department is the returning officer for the Legislative Council in South Australia.

²¹ Submission from former Premier of Tasmania, Evidence, p. S340.

3.12 Returning Officers – Resource Sharing

3.12.1 A number of submissions from AEC staff and the public service union raise the question of the more extensive use of AEC staff by the States as returning officers.²² Apart from Tasmania, Western Australia is the only state where AEC staff were used in this capacity at the most recent election. At the 1989 Western Australian election, five Divisional Returning Officers were appointed as returning officers for the Legislative Assembly and a member of the AEC's head office staff was appointed as a returning officer for one of the regions of the Legislative Council.²³

3.12.2 In Victoria, Divisional Returning Officers were used extensively as State Returning Officers in elections until 1985. In 1988 AEC staff were withdrawn shortly before the State election because of the proximity of the Commonwealth referendum. The Commonwealth and Victorian Commissioners had previously signed an agreement on the use of AEC staff which included provision for their withdrawal if a Commonwealth electoral event were to fall within six weeks of a State election. The State has not appointed any Commonwealth staff for the 1992 election and the Victorian Electoral Commissioner has indicated that he will not do so in the absence of a guarantee of availability at all times.²⁴

3.12.3 The Minister for Administrative Services has indicated that as the AEC's overriding responsibility is the proper discharge of its functions under the Commonwealth Electoral Act, no guarantee can be given as to the availability of AEC staff to act as returning officers in a State election.²⁵

²² Evidence, pp. S2, S57, S178, S202.

²³ Evidence, p. S264.

²⁴ Mr B Blackmore, DRO for Bruce, Evidence, p. S14. Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union, Evidence, pp. S194-95. Dr G Lyons, Evidence, pp. 390-91.

²⁵ Evidence, p. S13.

3.12.4 The Committee understands that some States might find it advantageous to engage some AEC staff as returning officers for the conduct of State elections. The Committee recognises that the appointment of a large number of AEC staff as State Returning Officers could jeopardise a Commonwealth election if it was held very close to a State election. Equally it recognises that the States need guarantees of the availability of Commonwealth staff.

The crucial point to be borne in mind ...is that because the AEC cannot guarantee the availability of its Divisional Returning Officers to act as State Returning Officers whenever a State election is called, a primary requirement for returning officers – availability to conduct an election whenever it might be called – is not present.²⁶

3.12.5 For many states the need for a guarantee is a threshold question in the possible engagement of AEC staff as SROs. In the Committee's view it should be possible for the AEC to consult with the State Commissions regarding a minimum number of AEC staff who could act as SROs and guarantee the availability of this agreed minimum number, regardless of the date of a Federal electoral event.

3.12.6

Recommendation 25. The Committee recommends that the AEC guarantee to provide an agreed number of staff to act as State Returning Officers.

3.13 Premises For State Returning Officers

3.13.1 In New South Wales, Victoria and to some extent in Queensland, temporary premises are rented by the State Electoral

²⁶ Evidence, p. S391, extract from the Victorian State Electoral Office's Report to Parliament, 1990-91.

Commissions during the election period. In South Australia, Western Australia and for the most part in Queensland, returning officers work either from home or, in the case of most government employees, from their usual place of work.

3.13.2 Many submissions raise the question of the use of AEC offices as premises for State Returning Officers.²⁷ AEC staff propose that divisional offices be used by State Returning Officers on the grounds of cost effectiveness:

The AEC divisional office is equipped with telephones, facsimile machine, photocopier, electronic mail and computerised enrolment and pay systems. The office is strategically located to meet the needs of the electorate. The fact that it is not utilised to its fullest capacity during a State election is a great waste of resources.²⁸ The cost in New South Wales of setting up ninety-nine offices for State Returning Officers would not be cheap...The cost to New South Wales taxpayers would be reduced significantly with the agreed use of AEC facilities. I would expect that there would have to be a degree of shared costs between the AEC and State authorities during the period of State elections. This will also reduce the cost to Australian taxpayers in the maintenance of divisional offices for State election periods. Why have two organisations paying for full rental for separate offices at the same time?²⁹

3.13.3 If AEC premises were to be used as the premises for State Returning Officers, there would be savings to the taxpayer. The Committee does not consider that dual functions during the State election period would cause major difficulties. Some payment would be required from the State to the Commonwealth, but given the dual purpose of the office, the amount is likely to be much less than the cost of renting separate offices. Indeed in a number of cases the State

²⁷ Mr B Blackmore, DRO for Bruce, Evidence, p. S14. Mr A Wilcox, DRO for Cowper, Evidence, p. S22. Mr G Edgley, polling booth OIC for Federal and council elections, and SRO, Evidence, p. S24. Mr A Forbes, DRO for MacArthur, Evidence, p. S36. Mr R Williams, Acting DRO for Brisbane, Evidence, pp. S178-79.

²⁸ Mr B Young, AEO for Western Australia, Evidence, p. S51.
²⁹ Mr I Jones, DRO for Parramatta, Evidence, p. S58.

Commissions in New South Wales and Victoria have found it impossible to negotiate short-term leases and have been forced to rent offices for a much longer period than required. If the Committee's recommendation of some collocation of divisional offices is taken up, there would be fewer offices available for State use. However, there would still be considerable capacity for this aspect of resource sharing.

3.13.4 As well as saving money, the arrangement would be more convenient for voters than using the temporary offices rented by the States during a State election period. Moreover the need to refer inquirers from one office to another would be obviated.

3.13.5 Experience in Tasmania and Western Australia would support such an arrangement. During House of Assembly elections in Tasmania, the AEC's offices are used as offices for State Returning Officers at the same time as for day-to-day AEC work. The dual function is performed without difficulty and electorates for the Tasmanian House of Assembly have many more electors than other State electorates. The Tasmanian Electoral Office does not reimburse the AEC with the exception of small payments for telephone and facsimile use, rental of photocopiers and after-hours electricity. Five Divisional Returning Officers acted as returning officers at the 1989 State election in Western Australia without taking leave. The State did not reimburse the Commonwealth for the use of AEC premises and equipment.

3.13.6 The Committee recognises that, because of factors such as location, some AEC offices will not be suitable as premises for State Returning Officers. However the Committee is of the view that the great majority will be.

3.13.7 The State Commissions would need to reimburse the AEC for the use of Commonwealth offices. An appropriate level of

reimbursement might be half of the costs of rental and equipment during the State election period.

3.13.8

Recommendation 26. The Committee recommends that where the AEC's offices are made available for use by State Returning Officers the States/Territory reimburse the AEC accordingly.

3.14 Storage of Material

3.14.1 In most States both the AEC and the State Electoral Commission have a store for election materials. Given the similarity of the materials and the similar nature of the work of materials planning officers for Commonwealth and State elections, joint storage facilities would seem to be feasible. Such joint facilities would be likely to result in savings.

3.14.2

Recommendation 27. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to establishing joint storage facilities in each State/Territory.

3.15 Polling Officials and Other Casual Staff for Elections

3.15.1 State elections provide an opportunity for AEC staff to gain work experience at polling places. Commonwealth elections

provide a similar opportunity for State staff.³⁰ The Committee is of the view that such experience is valuable even for quite senior staff of both levels of government. The best example of such exchanges of staff taking place in the past is at elections for the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly where many of the staff responsible for mobile and pre-poll voting are drawn from the AEC and the State Commissions.³¹

3.15.2

Recommendation 28. The Committee recommends that staff of both the AEC and State/Territory Commissions be encouraged to work as polling staff at elections for the other level of government.

3.15.3 Systems of proportional representation used in Australia are quite complex especially in respect of the scrutiny. In addition to Senate elections, such systems are now used in New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. It is important that significant numbers of electoral staff gain experience of such scrutinies when elections for the other level of government take place. Exchanges of staff have taken place in Western Australia.³²

3.15.4

Recommendation 29. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to developing a program of local exchanges of staff for scrutinies where proportional representation is involved.

3.15.5 In most States there is an exchange of information about suitable polling officials between the Commonwealth and State Commissions.³³ The use of the same polling officials for State and Federal elections is now quite widespread. The advantages of this practice are obvious.

3.15.6

Recommendation 30. The Committee recommends that the practice of exchanging information about suitable polling officials be adopted between the Commonwealth and State/Territory Commissions.

3.15.7

Recommendation 31. Where the performance of polling staff is satisfactory, the Committee recommends that the same staff be used for Commonwealth and State/Territory elections wherever possible.

³⁰ Evidence, p. S97.

³¹ Evidence, pp. S326, S227.

³² Evidence, p. S55.

3.15.8 A number of submissions suggest the joint training of polling staff.³⁴ As it is highly desirable that the training of polling staff take place shortly before the election concerned, joint training could only take place on the comparatively few occasions when Commonwealth and State elections fall closely together. Even then differing legislation and procedures are likely to cause problems.³⁵ The Committee does not consider that the suggestion should be pursued. However the Committee considers that there would be advantages in the permanent staff of the Commissions attending each other's training sessions of returning officers and polling officials.

3.15.9

Recommendation 32. The Committee recommends that the AEC invite staff of the State/Territory Commissions to attend training sessions for divisional staff and polling officials and that the State/Territory Commissions make a similar approach to the AEC.

3.15.10 It has been suggested that the AEC's computerised system for the payment of polling officials could be adapted for State purposes.³⁶ Several States have similar systems. Nevertheless there may be scope for resource sharing and savings.

3.15.11

Recommendation 33. The Committee recommends that the AEC and the State/Territory Commissions set up a working party to investigate the practicability of using the one computerised system for the payment of polling officials.

³⁴ See for example, Evidence, pp. S95.
³⁵ Evidence, p. S220.
³⁶ Evidence, pp. S201, S220.

CHAPTER 4

A SINGLE BODY FOR RUNNING ALL ELECTIONS?

The practicality, cost-effectiveness, efficiency and social desirability of a single electoral body to conduct all Federal and State elections.

While there was early support for the concept of a single body to conduct all elections, it became evident during the course of the inquiry that a single electoral body could not command the level of support required to establish it. The evidence for and against a single body was inconclusive. Support for the concept came from some AEC staff and from some local government representatives. A number of States suggested that the conduct of Federal elections could be contracted to them and administered through their network of temporary returning officers. This view was shared by the Liberal Party of Australia which expressed the view that State Commissions are 'closer to their client base'. The National Party of Western Australia proposed that the most effective way for the AEC to run its operations would be to contract its functions with the State Commissions. In commenting on a model for a single electoral authority, the AEC proposed that it be based on its present structure, which effectively suggested that the AEC conduct State elections.

The Committee is unable to recommend the establishment of a single electoral body, but many of the issues raised in the evidence on this matter will be of interest to all electoral practitioners, and these are surveyed in this chapter.

4.1 The Committee's Approach to a 'Single Body'

4.1.1 The terms of reference required the Committee to consider the practicality, cost-effectiveness, efficiency and social desirability of a single electoral body to conduct all Federal and State elections. For convenience the term 'single electoral body' has been used. It proved impractical to gather and marshall the evidence according to the categories given in the terms of reference. In the first place, they are interconnected and interdependent – it can hardly be

socially desirable if it is not efficient. More importantly, it became obvious early in the inquiry that if the proposition to establish a single electoral body proved unacceptable for any reason at all, no amount of cost-effectiveness or social desirability would restore it to favour. Accordingly, the Committee sought the views of relevant bodies and people on the concept of a single electoral body, rather than on any aspect of the concept, such as practicality or cost-effectiveness. It then analysed the resulting evidence. The format of this chapter reflects that process.

4.1.2 The chapter surveys the opinions of the main players, moving from the Australian Electoral Commission (both management and divisional staff), to the States, local government, political parties and others. It then analyses the evidence according to whether it favours or opposes a single body to conduct all elections. The chapter moves on to a consideration of the major issues raised in the analysis of the evidence, and problems identified in these issues. Some solutions which are considered (in addition to a single body to conduct all elections) are a body to deal with some aspect of electoral management, and other solutions to specific problems.

4.2 Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: The Australian Electoral Commission

4.2.1 Management: The views of the Australian Electoral Commission's management on a single electoral body can be summed up as 'wary'. The Commissioner, Mr Cox, told the Committee:

In its submission that we have already given you, the AEC did not advocate that there be only one body, but what we did do was to canvass what seemed to us to be some of the arguments in both directions.¹

¹ Evidence, p. 313.

4.2.2 In canvassing the issues the submission included statements such as:

A single Commission would be feasible provided a number of major issues were resolved. A single Commission would result in substantial overall savings for the taxpayer and would provide an enhanced service to the public.²

4.2.3 The Commission, in a later submission, noted that there would be 'accountability problems' with most of the range of simplistic suggestions put to the Committee so far. A possible solution was:

One option could be for Commonwealth and State Governments to have a small policy bureau which would advise Heads of Governments, with a separate authority to be established to contract its services to the Commonwealth, the States and Local Government as their needs arise. If the 'body' were run as a corporation, a suitable charge would be worked out for each event. the 'charge' would be based on a *menu of available services* and would take into account ALL costs associated with providing the service...³

4.2.4 Such detailed statements led some to suppose (wrongly) that the Australian Electoral Commission favoured the concept. Such are the pitfalls of addressing the terms of reference! At a later hearing the Acting Australian Electoral Commissioner, Dr R Bell, sought to set the record straight with the following:

We have not actually proposed a single body to run elections...⁴

4.2.5 The AEC's position was clarified when it provided its own commentary on the evidence in a submission provided in May 1992. In it the Commission listed sixteen submissions which supported a single electoral body and analysed the bases of support as economies,

streamlining, uniform requirements (including formality) and procedures, scrutiny accuracy and a reduction in voter confusion.⁵

4.2.6 In commenting on this support the Commission found that the problem of close proximity of elections was not addressed, claims that a single body would produce standardised voting systems were 'over optimistic' and that:

very little, if any, emphasis is laid upon the mechanisms by which a single authority will ensure the convergence of Commonwealth and State procedures⁶

4.2.7 **Divisional staff:** The caution felt by the Australian Electoral Commission's management regarding a single electoral body, in general was not shared by the staff of the divisional offices. Divisional Returning Officers were enthusiastic producers of submissions and witnesses in favour of a single body. Most (but not all) could see nothing but good in the idea of a single electoral body. Many envisaged the single body as an expanded AEC. A typical position was stated by Mr K Smith, the Divisional Returning Officer for New England, who considered that the Australian Electoral Commission (being more professional than its State counterparts) should run all elections in order to avoid voter confusion and because of the need for uniform procedures.⁷

4.2.8 The attitude underlying this position, and common to many of the Divisional Returning Officers was expressed in a letter signed by thirty-two of the thirty-eight DROs in Victoria and sent to the responsible Minister, Senator Bolkus, in May 1991, (and included as an attachment to a submission to this inquiry). In it the DROs proposed the involvement of AEC staff in Victorian elections. The

² Evidence, p. S240.

³ Evidence, p. S593.

⁴ Evidence, p. 600.

⁵ Evidence, p. S739.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Evidence, p. S12.

letter drew to the attention of the Minister 'the massive duplication and unnecessary expenditure associated with the conduct of State elections in Victoria'.⁸ A copy of the Minister's reply, to the effect that it was a State matter, was also provided to the Committee. This view of the States' conduct of their elections was also reflected in the evidence:

The bottom line on this issue is that the State Electoral Office duplicates the service provided by the Australian Electoral Commission.⁹

4.2.9 One DRO wanted the AEC to conduct elections for the three levels of government on the grounds that divisional staff have more expertise gained through experience and staff continuity, but recognised that fixed terms for State and Federal Parliaments would need to be introduced in order to make this solution practical.¹⁰

4.2.10 The evidence of the DROs and other divisional staff commanded much attention from the Committee. These are the people 'on the ground'. Many of them have had extensive experience of running elections, often as polling officials and returning officers for both State and Federal electoral bodies. They have the closest contact with polling officials and voters and consequently have an excellent understanding of the impact of differing electoral administrations on voters. Most were motivated by the apparent waste of resources and by the need to alleviate the evident confusion caused to voters, particularly in relation to the issuing of pre-poll and postal votes. Many DROs were sceptical of the practice of employing State Returning Officers only during the election periods.

⁸ Evidence, p. S17.
⁹ Mr B Blackmore, DRO Bruce, Evidence, p. S15.
¹⁰ Evidence, p. S20.

4.2.11 The Committee's attempt to find some solution to the problems that eight separate electoral administrations cause for voters was prompted largely by the evidence given by field staff. Some focussed on the problems. For example Mr G Edgley, who has been an AEC election casual, a State Returning Officer and OIC of a local government polling booth, was concerned about the cost of supporting two electoral bodies in New South Wales and was convinced the AEC should conduct all elections:

I have seen a gross waste of public money over the years, especially in the State area.¹¹

4.2.12 Others focussed on solutions:

We must be visionary and discard this part-time ad hoc approach which currently exists...¹²

4.2.13 Most evidence from divisional staff asserted that the AEC's field staff were more efficient, better trained and 'professional', at least partly because they were permanent and full-time employees.¹³

4.2.14 Three DROs recommended that the AEC (or a new single body) have a commercial arm for conducting elections and providing other electoral services for corporate bodies and newly emerging democracies overseas.¹⁴

¹¹ Evidence, p. S24.

¹² Mr D Delmo, DRO Kooyong, Evidence, p. S106.

¹³ Mr J Barlett, DRO Riverina-Darling, Evidence, p. S20; Mr A Wilcox, DRO Cowper, Evidence, p. S22; and Mr B Blackmore, DRO Bruce, Evidence, p. S15.

¹⁴ Mr J Jones, DRO Parramatta, Evidence, p. S59; and Mr R Patching, DRO Rankin and Mr A Hewson, DRO Hume, Evidence, p. S107.

4.2.15 Only one submission received from an AEC divisional staff member thought the model offered by State electoral bodies (with part-time Returning Officers) was desirable.¹⁵

4.3 Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: The States

4.3.1 No State supported the establishment of a single electoral body which was not controlled by the State, although former Premier Field from Tasmania was open to consideration of a single body. The sensitivity of the States was apparent to AEC management, as noted by Mr W Eaton, the Assistant Australian Electoral Officer in South Australia (appearing in a private capacity):

I can understand the States' reluctance to lose the control that they have over their own destiny. I think a national body would have to be very conscious of the fact that part of the national body located in that State would have to have a State component ... that was looking after State legislation requirements and procedures that are different. ... If there is a national body, it certainly has to be conscious of the State based requirements.¹⁶

4.3.2 Some States turned the proposition around and saw merit in all elections within the State being conducted by a single authority under the control of the individual State, owing something to the United States model.¹⁷ In the case of Western Australia, this would be a simple matter of the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) acting on behalf of the Commonwealth:

... the State Electoral Commission should assume responsibility for the conduct of elections and maintenance of rolls for both State and Federal Governments [but] it is recognised that issues remain to be resolved.¹⁸

¹⁵ Evidence, p. 834.

¹⁶ Evidence, p. 189.

¹⁷ Mr A Becker, Evidence, p. 145.

¹⁸ Evidence, p. 276.

4.3.3 It was claimed that it would cost less if the WAEC maintained the roll¹⁹ and that the WAEC could improve the current AEC methods of maintaining the roll through the use of habitation reviews.²⁰

4.3.4 Another State approach to the single electoral body proposal focussed on a single body for roll management, rather than for all electoral matters. This idea had its genesis in Victoria, and was then developed by South Australia. It was explained thus to the Committee by Mr Becker, the South Australian Electoral Commissioner:

...There would be a single electoral body. It is not my suggestion, I might add. It is Victoria's suggestion, but that is the way I envisage it. They see an electoral body which is made up perhaps of the chief electoral officers in each State and the Commonwealth, perhaps even to the point of having a ministerial body over the top of that. But they call the shots as far as the policy is concerned. Then, within each State, of course, you have got to have the administration. The administration could be either part of the existing electoral framework of the State or, alternatively, a separate small body... It would certainly be far more efficient than the way in which it is being done now.²¹

4.3.5 Mr Becker states that the single electoral body (in South Australia) would be more cost effective, efficient and socially desirable, claiming that:

...there are few (if any) Commonwealth organisations performing functions similar to States, which do not cost more to run.²²

¹⁹ Evidence, p. 8269.

²⁰ Evidence, p. 8270.

²¹ Evidence, p. 131.

²² Evidence, p. 8323.

4.3.6 The Victorian Electoral Commissioner, Dr G Lyons, while agreeing that from a public administration perspective, it is desirable to have one body conducting Federal and State elections, provided a list of requirements for that body which would be difficult to fulfil.²³ He suggested that:

... one option worthy of consideration is arranging for Victoria's Electoral Commissioner to conduct Federal elections under delegated authority.²⁴

4.3.7 The Northern Territory was unequivocally opposed to the establishment of a single electoral body:

... it would be neither practical nor desirable for a single body to conduct all Federal and State elections. This view is based on both the substantial constitutional and legislative constraints inherent in the proposal and recognition that the Northern Territory's electoral administration ...[has a] ... proven record...²⁵

4.3.8 New South Wales and Queensland also support the status quo, although Queensland could probably be counted as not opposed to the Victorian proposal for the States to conduct all elections within each State:

As far as a single body in Queensland conducting elections is concerned, after a lot of research and public exposure the EARC has produced a model which it considers effective and economic. I think that structure could clearly service Commonwealth elections. However, EARC was very careful not to prescribe – even though there was power within the State Government to do so – that the Queensland Electoral Commission conduct all local government elections.²⁶

²³ Evidence, p. S355.

²⁴ Evidence, p. S356.

²⁵ Evidence, p. S327.

²⁶ Evidence, p. 474.

4.3.9 The New South Wales view is that:

Subject to the outcome of this Inquiry I am of the view that the status quo of separate State/Commonwealth electoral bodies be maintained. Should the Divisional Returning Office network be dismantled, this State could conduct Commonwealth elections in New South Wales with its present structure of Local Government and State Returning Officers.

Alternatively, if the Commonwealth transferred to a process of part-time Returning Officers, consideration would be given to the common use of such officers for State and Local Government purposes.²⁷

4.4 Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: Local Government

4.4.1 The Committee received submissions from several local government authorities all of which supported a single electoral body, or the Australian Electoral Commission to conduct local government elections. The evidence from local government focussed on three issues:

- difficulties local authorities found in conducting their own elections;
- problems they had encountered when the State electoral bodies were involved in local government elections; and
- satisfactory experiences of Australian Electoral Commission involvement in local government elections.

4.4.2 The submission from the Caboolture Shire Council touched on the sensitive position of the Shire Clerk who was often also the returning officer for a local election:

²⁷ Evidence, p. S72.

... if local authority elections were conducted by an independent body there can be no doubt as to fairness which may otherwise be implied by the utilisation of Council staff.²⁸

4.4.3 This council also expressed dissatisfaction with polling place equipment provided by the State (in this case, Queensland):

The State equipment is generally in poor condition and certainly does not enhance the standard of a polling place by the well used appearance.²⁹

4.4.4 The Council listed five benefits of having a single body to run elections for all three levels of government, all of which relate to greater efficiency. They are:

- better public perceptions if elections are conducted by an independent and expert body;
- more efficient and effective conduct of elections;
- more regular use of equipment;
- more modern methods and resources; and
- common regulations for each elections and less confusion for voters.

4.4.5 The Tweed Shire Council approved of a single body on the grounds of social desirability (avoiding voter confusion) and cost effectiveness.³⁰ The Young Shire Council supported a single electoral body on the grounds that it was confusing for local government authorities to have to deal with the State Electoral Commission and the Australian Electoral Commission.³¹ The Parramatta City Council proposed that the Australian Electoral Commission be the single electoral body.³²

²⁸ Evidence, p. 5493.

²⁹ Evidence, p. 5494.

³⁰ Evidence, p. 550.

³¹ Evidence, pp. 10-11.

³² Evidence, p. 561.

4.4.6 Mr I Roberts, the Acting Chief Clerk of the Parramatta City Council, noted that while the State Electoral Office was cooperative:

... It has been somewhat difficult to contact the persons who have been nominated by the State Electoral Office for contact during the local government elections, evidently due to their pressing work requirements and the fact that they are probably dealing with other councils at the same time.³³

4.4.7 In commenting on the possible role of the AEC in local government elections, Mr Roberts said:

We are not in a situation of trying to tell someone how to run their own organisation. The only thing that I could say there is that the Australian Electoral Commission is already in existence, it is set up, and it is felt that it could absorb the work carried out by the State Electoral Commission.³⁴

4.5 Survey of Views on a Single Electoral Body: Political Parties and Others

4.5.1 The mainstream political parties which addressed the issue of a single electoral body were solidly against the concept. (The Australian Labor Party submission did not address the issue). The Liberal Party found the idea raised 'fundamental questions relating to the nature of Australian Federalism' and was:

... contrary to the nature and history of Australian Federalism ... and ... contrary to the current mood for reform of Federal-State relations.³⁵

³³ Evidence, p. 424.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Evidence, pp. 5329-30.

4.5.2 In addition, the Liberal Party saw the State electoral bodies as being closer to their client base and therefore able to undertake functions on behalf of the AEC:

The Liberal Party is of the view that where duplication in administrative functions does occur greater consideration should be given, where appropriate, to letting the State and Territory electoral bodies (being closer to their client base) undertake particular functions on behalf of the AEC. Such an approach would be consistent with the 'subsidiary principle' contained within the four principles recently adopted by the Premiers and Chief Ministers for reconsidering the agreed allocation of roles and responsibilities among levels of government in Australia.³⁶

4.5.3 At the public hearing in Canberra in May 1992 the Liberal Party summarised its objections:

The Liberal Party opposes the establishment of a single electoral body for five reasons: first of all, it is contrary to the nature and history of Australian Federalism; secondly, a single electoral body would have competing demands placed on it by various governments which would raise questions of loyalty; thirdly, the creation of a single body would create enormous pressure to harmonise electoral laws which raise questions concerning the sovereignty of our parliaments; fourthly, the complexities of dealing with differing legislative regimes; and, finally, the difficulties that arise in dealing with two or more elections held within a short period.³⁷

4.5.4 The National Party of Australia (Western Australia) opposed the concept of a single body because of its objections to centralisation:

The delivery of services is improved when the area to be serviced is kept small. Centralised systems are cumbersome and inefficient.³⁸

³⁶ Evidence, p. S333.
³⁷ Evidence, p. 574.
³⁸ Evidence, p. S388.

4.5.5 The National Party of Australia (Queensland) was also strongly opposed to the concept:

An essential part of the Australian Federal system is plural centres of political power which should be maintained to protect individual rights.³⁹

4.5.6 The Lismore Greens were the only political party in favour of a single body on the grounds that confusion was caused by the differences between the Commonwealth Electoral Act and those Acts which affect State elections. Greater efficiency and cost saving were also cited as reasons for a single electoral body.⁴⁰

4.5.7 The Electoral Reform Society of South Australia was also opposed to a centralised single electoral body, which would not be conducive to innovation and variation of procedures.⁴¹

4.5.8 This survey of views on the concept of a single electoral body concludes with two groups who favoured the idea – the union and several Federal Members of Parliament. The submission from the Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union reflected the fact that this union represents Australian Electoral Commission members with the largest number of AEC members being from the divisional offices. The union was a supporter of the concept:

... We believe that the opportunities for further cost sharing, and the potential development of one electoral body would provide efficiencies for both State and Commonwealth Governments. Further, we believe that further resource sharing will naturally progress towards the creation of one electoral body ...⁴²

³⁹ Evidence, p. S395.
⁴⁰ Evidence, pp. S231-52.
⁴¹ Evidence, p. S103.
⁴² Evidence, p. S190.

4.5.9 Submissions were received from four Federal Members of Parliament, from different political parties. All considered that the Australian Electoral Commission should conduct all elections, citing various reasons but all laudatory of the AEC's efficiency and outstanding record.

4.6 'Pros and Cons' – An Assessment of the Arguments For and Against a Single Body for the Conduct of Elections

4.6.1 In surveying the evidence on a single body, brief reference has been made to the reasons put forward for supporting or opposing the concept. These reasons have been given (for the most part) without much analysis or even comment. The Committee believes that a closer consideration of the arguments for and against a single electoral body will be of interest to electoral practitioners and the general public.

4.7 'Those in Favour'

4.7.1 As recounted above, much of the enthusiasm for a single body came from the Divisional Returning Officers of the AEC and other electoral practitioners. Many had worked as divisional staff or polling officials for prodigious lengths of time, and had experience of both Federal and State electoral administrations. The problems described in this evidence aroused considerable concern by Committee members, and resulted in a concerted effort to determine whether a single electoral body was possible. Most of these matters are considered in detail in Chapter 3. Some aspects of the 'pro' case are provided here because they arose in the context of arguments for a single electoral body. It is to be hoped that managers of electoral Commissions can alleviate some of the difficulties by the application of remedies other than a single electoral body.

4.7.2 One obvious cause for concern, and a common argument raised in favour of a single body, is the large number of voters for State electoral events who telephone or call into divisional offices for assistance. Such efforts are usually to no avail, resulting in disillusioned or angry electors. In New England:

During the period of the 1991 State Election, this office received 1100 enquiries on State matters alone.⁴³

4.7.3 The situation on the Gold Coast seems particularly severe, leaving one DRO to note that:

The majority of people don't understand the electoral process, are not aware there is more than one electoral provider and are too apathetic to care.⁴⁴

4.7.4 In response to a request from the Committee, the Australian Electoral Officer in Queensland endeavoured to quantify the extent of elector inquiries at divisional offices and State head office, relating to the 1992 Queensland referendum on daylight saving. He estimated that there were 24 066 phone calls and 10 256 counter enquiries throughout Queensland – a large number considering that all these enquiries were directed to the wrong organisation. (See paragraph 2.5.16).

4.7.5 By far the largest number were directed to the collocated Gold Coast divisional offices.⁴⁵ Some solution by management to this situation could surely be worked out. Mr N Pember from the AEC Staff Association in Western Australia has proposed one possible solution:

⁴³ Evidence, p. S12.

⁴⁴ Evidence, p. S500.

⁴⁵ Evidence, p. S618.

The States would not relinquish any powers to the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth would not relinquish any powers to the States. We thought that we could perhaps retain both the State and Federal bodies, but put their head offices in the one building. That way you could have one telephone network and have the one switchboard. If it was a Commonwealth matter that person could pass [it] on to the Commonwealth, and if it was a state matter it could go to the State.⁴⁶

4.7.6 There is no doubt that some voter confusion over the existence of two electoral administrations in each State is a two way street. The Committee received some evidence that State Electoral Offices get enquiries about Federal electoral events, but such inquiries seem minuscule in comparison with the calls made to Federal divisional offices. One State Commissioner (Mr Dickson from New South Wales) acknowledged that voter convenience would be served by a single body:

One could also point to the social desirability of a single electoral body *specially for the convenience of the public*. There is no argument that many electors confuse both the State and Australian Electoral Commission offices.⁴⁷

4.7.7 Not all the problems revealed in the 'pro' case are susceptible of solution at the management level. Many of the supporters of a single body cite the need for uniform procedures as a rationale for this position. The DRO for New England for instance states that:

State Returning Officers who work for me are quite open in their desire for a single set of rules and procedures.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Evidence, p. 79.

⁴⁷ Evidence, p. 871.

⁴⁸ Evidence, p. 812.

4.7.8 Unfortunately most of these rules and procedures are the result of legislation rather than management initiatives. Professor Hughes noted in this regard:

Merging, or even co-ordinating, electoral administrations is not going to resolve these difficulties which arise from political decisions about voting systems embodied in detailed legislation.⁴⁹

4.7.9 The Committee has received information regarding the training of returning officers and polling officials, which was canvassed in Chapter 3. Evidence on training has been used as an argument for and an argument against a single electoral body. The allegations about unsatisfactory training of State Returning Officers do not seem to be as relevant an issue as the fact that different jurisdictions have different procedures, and these inconvenience the voting public.

4.7.10 The Committee noted the support for a single body from two people with substantial management experience in electoral matters, Mr D Farrell and Mr C Ball, who both gave evidence in a private capacity:

... both of us had one ultimate goal and that was the service that the electoral process, in relation to both enrolment and voting, could provide to the body politic in general, to the candidates at elections and to the voter particularly... an electoral process should be directed – rather than to the more narrow objective as to who does it – to the objective that, whoever does do it the best, and does it in the most efficient and effective way to provide that service.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Evidence, p. 8425.

⁵⁰ Mr C Ball, Evidence, p. 206.

4.8 'Those Against'

4.8.1 The Committee was well aware, even while collecting evidence on the topic of a single electoral body, that the actual reasons for not supporting a single body were, in a sense, irrelevant. If the State and Federal governments for any reason do not support the idea, no amount of rational argument in its favour can be of any avail. It was clear early in the inquiry that there was insufficient support for a single electoral body to make it a feasible option in the current political environment.

4.8.2 In surveying the 'no case', this section of the report focuses on the accountability/responsibility arguments which render the concept of a single body unacceptable to many. Other issues were raised as reasons for opposing a single body and they will be briefly considered.

4.8.3 Perhaps the strongest arguments put against a single body could be described as the 'Federalism' arguments. Such arguments were put by a variety of witnesses, but the following views from the Northern Territory and Western Australia convey the gist of the matter. Mr Phillips, the Chief Electoral Officer for the Northern Territory sought legal advice on the idea of a single body and was informed:

It is submitted that it is essential to the concept of self-government whether exercised by the Crown in right of a State or of a Territory, that the self-governing entity should be able to control its own electoral processes through whatever mechanisms or institutions it chooses...

In particular, real questions of lines of accountability would arise if a single outside body was established to take control of all electoral processes in Australia.⁵¹

4.8.4 The sensitivity of the relationship between the electoral body and the parliament it serves was highlighted by the fact that some witnesses had difficulty in accepting the Committee's jurisdiction to consider a single body. The Liberal Party of Australia (Western Australia) considered the Committee had no business even discussing Western Australia's elections. The acting State Director of the party forwarded the text of an urgency motion on the subject which was carried unanimously. It stated (*inter alia*):

...this [State] Council affirms that any decisions relating to the conduct of elections for the Western Australian Parliament is a matter for that Parliament alone and this State Council rejects any proposal to give or consider giving to the Commonwealth Government the State Electoral Department's power and administrative functions to conduct State elections.

... this Council considers that deliberation on the matter by a Joint Standing Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament is inconsistent with the comity that should exist between the sovereign Parliaments of Australia ...⁵²

4.8.5 Several witnesses attempted to find a way around the 'federalist' arguments.⁵³ Mr B Nugent, the AEO for New South Wales supported a joint authority to manage the roll which would include a mechanism for consultation and control.⁵⁴ Mr Lamerton, a Divisional Returning Officer from Queensland, had a more modest proposal:

⁵¹ Exhibits, pp. 254-55.

⁵² Evidence, p. S82.

⁵³ For example, Mr I Jones, DRO Parramatta, Evidence, p. S396.

⁵⁴ Evidence, p. 405.

*... I do not believe that the sensibilities of the States, for example, would let us take over the total running of their elections. I cannot see any reason why, from an idealistic point of view, we cannot act as their agents to do their elections.*⁵⁵

4.8.6 Mr Ball, an experienced electoral practitioner now retired, noted that the independence of the single body would be crucial:

*... the way to develop a Commission whereby it has absolute independence and freedom from any real or perceived influence is part of the model that [we] have developed ... for what could be the new order of an electoral authority in this country – a single electoral authority rather than a multiplicity of them.*⁵⁶

4.8.7 Other matters raised as arguments against a single electoral body are dealt with elsewhere in this report, but should be noted in the context of opposition to the concept of a single body. One of these matters is costs. As noted in Chapter 2, several States believe they conduct elections in a more cost effective way than the Commonwealth. Such claims were raised in relation to a single body as well as in relation to the cost of elections, *on the grounds that any joint venture with the Commonwealth would increase costs payable by the States.*

4.8.8 The divisional office network was similarly raised as an argument against a single body. It was seen as such an integral part of Commonwealth electoral administration, and there was concern that cooperation with the Commonwealth might involve accepting the network.⁵⁷

4.8.9 Concern about the divisional structure was also expressed by the Victorian Electoral Commissioner, Dr G Lyons:

⁵⁵ Evidence, p. 561.

⁵⁶ Evidence, pp. 210-11.

⁵⁷ Evidence, p. S263.

So long as the AEC retains its inefficient and costly Divisional structure, any proposed merger of the SEO with the AEC could not be supported. Any such merger would lead to increased costs for the State, with no corresponding benefits.⁵⁸

4.9 Problems and Solutions

4.9.1 The evidence for and against a single electoral body highlighted problems caused to voters and electoral practitioners, inherent in Australia's multiplicity of electoral administrations. Solutions to some of these problems are considered in Chapter 3 but the possibility of a single electoral body started on the menu of possible solutions.

4.9.2 Other possible solutions put to and considered by the Committee involved hiving off parts of electoral administration to a custom-designed single body. Mrs E Gladwin and Mr S O'Brien, for example, proposed that:

*... consolidation of electoral administration could be a process whereby separate elements of electoral administration could be gradually assumed by a new body [which could be jointly appointed].*⁵⁹

4.9.3 The possibility of a single body to manage the electoral rolls for all jurisdictions was given much attention by the Committee. Aspects of this possible solution to problems revealed in the evidence, are considered in Chapter 6.

4.9.4 In contemplating a single electoral body, considerable time and effort was spent in contemplating different models and the appropriate lines of responsibility and authority, which would be appropriate for each model. The Australian Securities Commission and

⁵⁸ Evidence, p. S346.

⁵⁹ Evidence, p. S420.

the National Crime Authority were viewed as potential models, but abandoned because the differences in the tasks outweighed the common factor of Commonwealth/State cooperation. As the inquiry progressed, the Committee members and those witnesses who had favourably regarded a single body became more wary of the concept. Mr Farrell, who with Mr Ball had described a possible model in detail during the Hobart public hearings in March, was considerably less enthusiastic in Canberra in May:

I will not pursue the single electoral body that we spoke to you of in Tasmania. I think the reality of the situation is that this really is not going to be a goer.⁶⁰

4.9.5 Professor Hughes may well be correct when he asserts:

The possibility of having only one set of electoral authorities, the States, was lost shortly after Federation, when the Commonwealth chose to set up its own machinery on the ground that differences in the Federal and State electoral systems required different electoral officials to administer them.⁶¹

4.9.6 Whilst opportunities exist for sharing in a variety of ways that are referred to elsewhere in this report, the Committee concludes that it is impractical to establish a single body to conduct all Federal and State elections.

⁶⁰ Evidence, p. 666.
⁶¹ Evidence, p. 5424.

CHAPTER 5

MAINTAINING THE ROLLS: BACKGROUND TO THE JOINT ROLLS

The fourth term of reference of this inquiry became the focus for somewhat heated debate between the State Commissioners and the AEC. The AEC currently collects the raw data for the rolls for all jurisdictions (except for the Legislative Council roll in Tasmania). The resulting rolls are called 'joint rolls'. For most States this has been the case for a very long time and the joint roll has been in operation to the relative mutual satisfaction of all parties for much of its history.

Times change. The economic environment and changes to public sector management, particularly the growth of the 'user pays' culture, have had an impact on how the States and the Commonwealth regard the joint roll. In 1991 the Prime Minister wrote to each State Premier (except for South Australia and Queensland which had recently agreed or were about to agree, on updated joint roll negotiations), giving notice that the Commonwealth found it necessary to collect 50 per cent of the direct costs of providing the roll for the relevant State. This has had the natural effect of causing the States to look more closely at the product provided by the AEC, to ensure that by the time they are paying half the direct costs they will be getting good value for money.

An eminent historian, Professor Butterfield, once observed that 'all history is contemporary history'. The States' concerns about 'the current methods and costs of maintaining electoral rolls' reflect this notion. It proved impossible to consider current methods as a separate entity from the history of those methods. Consequently, the history of the joint rolls has been explored in some depth in this chapter.

5.1 History of the Rolls – Early Days

5.1.1 The first Federal election, conducted on 29 and 30 March 1901, had of necessity to proceed under the laws of the several colonies then being joined in Federation and to use the electoral rolls compiled under those laws. Sections 10 and 31 of the Constitution had specified that, until the Commonwealth Parliament had otherwise provided, 'the laws in force in each State, for the time being, relating to elections for

the more numerous House of the Parliament of the State shall, as nearly as practicable, apply to elections of Senators and Members of the House of Representatives respectively from that State. Variations in franchise provisions and electoral procedures were substantial and the need for national legislation was generally accepted.

5.1.2 In June-July 1901, a conference of the Commonwealth's senior electoral officers-designate was held in Melbourne and the proposals arising out of that conference provided the outline for the development of the Commonwealth's electoral laws.

5.1.3 On the subject of enrolment procedures, the conference recommended that they be modelled on those already existing in South Australia and Tasmania which had 'worked with such ease, and given so much satisfaction, with such a small percentage of waste of electoral power, with due regard for economy.'

5.1.4 The conference thought that compilation of the first Commonwealth rolls would be a problem and suggested using information from the recent census instead of the existing state rolls which were suspect because some included electors from municipal rolls with their property and plural franchises. As an alternative it was thought that lists should be compiled from the census of persons with the necessary qualifications, allocating them as far as possible to particular polling places. The lists could then go to the electoral registrars who would make any necessary alterations, utilising the services of the State police and postmasters.

5.1.5 In November 1902, following the passage of the Commonwealth Franchise Act and the Commonwealth Electoral Act, the Prime Minister wrote to the Premiers of all States except New South Wales, seeking assistance from their police to collect the provisional lists of electors. Separate arrangements for roll preparation obtained in New South Wales, as the franchise in that

State was almost as liberal as that of the Commonwealth and an Act for 'the enfranchisement of womanhood' had been assented to less than three months earlier, on 27 August 1902. Police in New South Wales had already been organised to canvass in January and February 1903 for the names of females entitled to the franchise. In the same year, temporary clerks were appointed in each State capital to receive names from police collectors, to group electors around their designated polling places, and to forward the resulting lists as they were completed to the State government printers so that they could start printing the rolls. The first election held on the new roll and under the Commonwealth legislation took place on 16 December 1903.

5.1.6 In May 1904 a Select Committee was appointed by the House of Representatives to inquire into the conduct of the 1903 election and the administration of the Commonwealth Electoral Act. Its report in October was favourable, at least as regards enrolment activities:

Your Committee considers no better scheme could have been devised than the house to house collection. The police and other officers concerned performed the duties imposed upon them exceedingly well. Many cases of omission of names from the rolls undoubtedly occurred. These cases were due to inadvertence in collection, error in the compilation or revision of rolls, or failure on the part of the elector to comply with the notice to appear before the Revision Courts after objection taken of change of residence. With the exception of the Airly roll (250 electors had been disfranchised through failure to send a list revised by the Macquarie Division Revision Court to the NSW Government Printer), there was no evidence of the general omission of names from the rolls. Owing to the difference in franchise between the Commonwealth and State laws, it was impossible to make the States' rolls solely the basis of the collection. Every effort was made to ascertain the names of persons entitled to enrolment, and the fullest publicity was given as to electoral rights and methods of enrolment.

5.1.7 In relation to the terms of reference of the present inquiry, the 1904 Select Committee also made the following rather prophetic observations:

The evidence reveals that a great saving to the Australian people could be effected by the adoption of an uniform franchise and electoral system. By the acceptance of the uniform franchise and polling places in common, the one collection and revision of names, and the one set of rolls could be made to serve both the Commonwealth and States...Further economies would result if the same sets of officers could do the electoral duties for both Commonwealth and States.

5.1.8 At a Premiers' Conference held in Hobart in 1905, the subject of the duplication of labour and expense in maintaining separate Federal and State electoral rolls was addressed.

5.1.9 The Premiers' Conference agreed to refer the whole subject of electoral uniformity to the respective electoral and legal departments. The 1905 Bill when introduced in the Senate sought to make provision for both sub-divisions for redistribution purposes and polling-place areas for enrolment purposes, but the practical difficulties of defining geographical units as small as polling-place areas were thought to be too great.

5.1.10 By 1908 all divisions had been divided into sub-divisions, thereby allowing joint rolls to be maintained with the States as electors' names could be grouped into blocks common to units used by both a Commonwealth electoral division and a State electoral district. The first Joint Rolls arrangement was entered into by the Governor-General and the Governor of the State of Tasmania on 14 December 1908.

5.1.11 In January 1914 a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the conduct of the Federal elections held in 1913, the

method of enrolment and the revision of the electoral rolls, the prevention of plural voting and personation and the improvement of the electoral law and administration. In its subsequent report of 3 July 1915, observations were made in respect of the desirability of having joint Commonwealth and State rolls:

As already stated in our interim report, we strongly urge the adoption of joint Commonwealth and State rolls. The system has worked satisfactorily in Tasmania, the rolls for that State being in a more perfect condition than in any other; also a system of small subdivision or polling place rolls should be adopted so as to allow for co-terminus boundaries for Commonwealth and State electorates. If we are to have electoral reform, it is very evident that enrolment areas must be considerably reduced in size; they are now too unwieldy for careful and systematic control.

5.1.12 The 1915 Royal Commission report also provides some insight into the methods used in maintaining rolls at that time. Although the Commonwealth Electoral Office introduced a card index system in 1912, the Commission reported:

In our investigation we found many persons enrolled more than once in one Division, several on more than one Division roll within a State, and numbers enrolled in more than one State, thus indicating that the card index apparently breaks down under its own weight at the most important period, i.e., just prior to an election, when it is impossible to deal with the enormous rush of cards.

5.1.13 Bearing in mind that the card index system had been in use for a short time only prior to the 1913 elections the Commission also reported that 'with its development and the employment of permanent officials in its maintenance the index has become increasingly valuable and effective.'

5.1.14 Joint rolls agreements were subsequently settled with South Australia in 1920 (updated in 1924 and 1988), Victoria in 1924

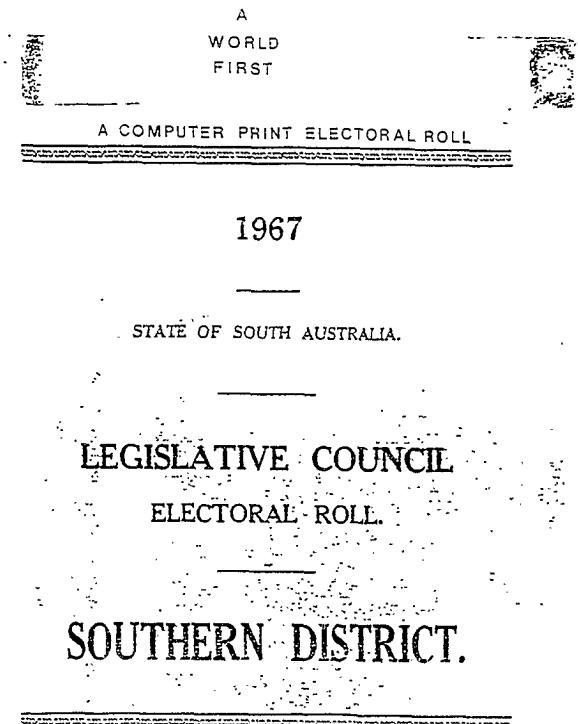
(updated in 1936, 1948, 1953 and 1957), New South Wales in 1929 (updated 1979), Western Australia in 1983, the Northern Territory in 1989 and Queensland in 1991. The Queensland agreement took effect on 1 January 1992.

5.2 The Introduction of Computers

5.2.1 The card index system, or derivations of it, apparently continued to be used in all States until the late 1960s, when the chief State Electoral Officer in South Australia organised the world's first computer generated and printed roll for a by-election in the Southern District of the Legislative Council. That roll was produced in 1967 by a computer housed at the University of Adelaide which was initially installed to service the requirements of the Woomera rocket range.¹

5.2.2 The cover and explanatory memorandum of this roll are reproduced below.

¹ Evidence, p. 129.



THIS ROLL WAS PRINTED AT THE DIRECTION OF
THE HONOURABLE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.

A writ was issued on 12th May, 1967 commanding that election be made for one member to serve in the Legislative Council. Such member will be elected to represent the District of SOUTHERN.

The roll closed for this election at 6 p.m. on Friday the 12th May, 1967.

All addition and deletion information was ready for processing from punch cards to tape by 9 p.m. on that date. Within about 3 hours the rolls had been printed by the Computer at the University of Adelaide, Department of Computing Science.

On Monday 15th May, 1967, the Computer print was delivered to the South Australian Government Photolithographer for printing.

As Subdivisions printed in sheet form were completed, they were delivered to the Government Printer, Adelaide, for binding.

This main roll is now available for the election on June 17th, 1967, having taken just over a week from close of roll to delivery of Print.

Certain deficiencies exist in this print; such as omission of certain qualifications, places of living etc. In each of these cases the error is a carry over from the roll as previously manually maintained, and in no case has a mistake of the Computer been observed.

Special tribute is due to Professor J. Ovensone of the University of Adelaide and to Dr. John Sanderson who at an absurdly short notice produced the rolls of the Subdivisions, correctly paged, headed and in the agreed lay out form.

Special thanks are due to the South Australian Government Printer and the South Australian Government Photolithographer for their participation in the production of this first roll prepared by Computer in South Australia.



(N.B. DOUGLASS)
ASSISTANT RETURNING OFFICER FOR THE STATE

State Electoral Department,
ADELAIDE. S.A.

5.2.3 As a result of the success of this operation, arrangements were subsequently made for a joint Commonwealth and State computer generated roll to be printed in South Australia. That roll was compiled to reflect voting entitlements as at 25 November 1968. Commonwealth and State rolls have continued to be produced by computer in South Australia since the late 1960s, using a mainframe computer housed at the State Government's computing centre. Initially a batch system was used to update the database on a daily basis. However, in December 1986 a real-time system, locally known as EAGLE, became operative. That system was developed as a collaborative project involving staff of the State Commission, local staff of the AEC and technical specialists of the State Government computing centre. It resulted in all DROs having on-line access to the database. The total cost of program development is understood to have been approximately \$500 000, which was shared equally between the AEC and the State Commission.²

5.2.4 At the present time a pilot study is being undertaken in South Australia to determine the feasibility of providing an interactive connection of the joint database with that State's geographic database. It is believed by the South Australian Electoral Commissioner that such a connection will provide an opportunity to tap into other publicly available information which may be useful for roll maintenance purposes.³

5.3 The Development of Computerised Rolls by the AEC

5.3.1 Although the computer programs of the South Australian system were jointly owned, the AEC (or more correctly its predecessor, the Australian Electoral Office), decided in the early 1970s to develop separate programs for the maintenance of rolls in other States. That

² Evidence, p. 8826.

³ Evidence, p. 622.

system, which became known as COM, was also State-based and relied on batch processing for updating.

5.3.2 As there was considerable debate during the course of this inquiry on whether a national database should be State-based (decentralised) or centralised, it is useful to describe events which led to the subsequent development of a centralised system.

5.3.3 In 1983, the Australian Electoral Office undertook strategic computer planning exercises in conjunction with Price Waterhouse Associates Pty Ltd, to assess the most appropriate configuration for a roll maintenance network. Price Waterhouse produced two reports on this subject; one in May 1983 and another in January 1984. It is noted that the views of the States were not sought during these consultancies, even though many had joint roll agreements with the Commonwealth.

5.3.4 In any event, the 1984 report focussed on four possible computing strategies, two of which were discounted on the grounds of cost. (Both envisaged the installation of on-line facilities). Of the two remaining options, the first (option 1) contemplated the installation of micro computers in divisional and head offices, with a mainframe or mini computer at central office, Canberra. The second option (option 2) was similar to option 1, the major difference being that central office processing power was to be shared with State head offices, which would each control and maintain the rolls for the divisions within their respective States.

5.3.5 In relation to these options, although Price Waterhouse favoured option 1, the following observations are made in its January 1984 report:

On the other hand, as mentioned previously in this section, locating the roll at [AEC State] Head Office is likely to be most acceptable to

the States and this would have a positive effect in maintaining and promoting Joint Roll arrangements.⁴

The one factor which is difficult to assess is the degree of political significance associated with joint rolls and therefore to the relatively greater merit of Option 2 which would provide each Head Office/State with its own roll.⁵

5.3.6 Following the creation of the AEC in 1984, Computer Sciences of Australia (CSA) was engaged to report upon the possible impact of State and local government requirements on the Commission's long-term computer strategy. During that study CSA consulted staff of State Commissions and, in Tasmania, local government officials.

5.3.7 In its report of October 1984, CSA favoured a decentralised approach and observed at paragraph 13:

None of the above recommendations nor any of the investigations so far indicate a need for consolidated Australia wide database. Indeed, the two other consultancy teams independently investigating other aspects of the overall CSA consultancy also reported that there was no requirement for a consolidated Australia wide database.

Since the Price Waterhouse study was completed, a new workstation technology has emerged and matured in the market place. Had Price Waterhouse considered this new "micro-mainframe" (terminology from James Martin) technology, CSA believes that the cost comparison would also favour a decentralised approach.

5.3.8 After considering the comments and recommendations of CSA, the AEC resolved to embark upon a strategy which would have resulted in rolls being maintained at divisional level, with the use of micro computers.⁶ That strategy was detailed in another document,

⁴ Price Waterhouse Report on the AEC on Computer Planning, 1984, p. 65.

⁵ Ibid, p. 75.

⁶ Evidence, p. S762.

also prepared by CSA and published in March 1985. Under this strategy, a decentralised network was to have been in operation during 1987-88.

5.3.9 Evidence does not indicate when work on the implementation of this decentralised strategy commenced, although it is surprising that funding assurances were not obtained in the first instance.⁷

5.4 RMANS and the Development of a Centralised Roll

5.4.1 The new system, which has become known as RMANS, was to be implemented in three phases. After the July 1987 Federal elections the AEC found it necessary to abort the third phase and redirect its energies in pursuing a centralised strategy.

5.4.2 As indicated in the 1988-89 Annual Report of the AEC, the revised roll management programs under RMANS came into operation in late 1988 and early 1989. At the time these programs became operational, the data held on the Canberra mainframe computer was not capable of producing local government and other ancillary roll products required by the States.

5.4.3 The AEC's new roll management system (RMANS), was first used for the Tasmanian elections in May 1989 and then for the Federal elections in March 1990.⁸ It has since produced rolls and associated products for all subsequent State electoral events, except those in South Australia.

5.4.4 With the exception of South Australia, all divisions are now connected to RMANS in an on-line mode.⁹ Although the AEC advised¹⁰ that from early 1992 the RMANS database will be converted from street segments to individual addresses, this had not occurred as at July 1992. Similarly the supply of elector information to Federal MPs promised in early 1992¹¹ has not eventuated because of delays by the Department of Administrative Services which apparently has responsibility for providing the encoded floppy disks.

⁷ Evidence, p. S596.
⁸ AEC Annual Report 1989/90.

⁹ Evidence, p. S235.
¹⁰ Evidence, p. S236.
¹¹ Evidence, p. S237.

CHAPTER 6

CURRENT METHODS AND COSTS OF ROLL MAINTENANCE

Caution should be exercised in reaching conclusions about the costs of roll maintenance because estimating these costs proved more difficult than expected.

Evidence provided on the methods of roll maintenance tended to be technical in nature. Computer consultants representing both the centralised and decentralised databases schools of thought were much to the fore. As South Australia is the only State which has a decentralised database (not integrated with the national database), this chapter pays some attention to maintenance of the joint roll on the EAGLE system in that State.

Much of the evidence relating to this chapter focussed on the product (the rolls), on the computer software producing it called RMANS (Roll Management System), on the development of the computer programs, and on the consultation (or lack thereof) with the States regarding that development. In keeping with the terminology adopted by witnesses during the inquiry, 'RMANS' is used as a shorthand reference for the rolls produced using the RMANS computer program.

6.1 Difficulties in Assessing Roll Costs

6.1.1 Shortly after the initial terms of reference of this inquiry were advertised, several State Commissioners met with the then Committee Chairman (Hon L Brereton, MP), to discuss whether the methods and costs of maintaining rolls could be included for consideration. As a result of that meeting, the Minister for Administrative Services on 16 October 1991 expanded the terms of reference to require the Committee to report upon this additional subject matter.

6.1.2 The difficulties in analysing the costs of conducting elections referred to in Chapter 2 were also inherent in considering roll

maintenance costs. While the AEC is the only body responsible for the collection of data for the rolls, each State has a different arrangement with the Commonwealth for the reimbursement of joint roll costs. In addition each State has individual practices¹ regarding further processing of the data.

6.1.3 Each of the State electoral bodies provided information on the costs of its roll activities. The AEC provided considerable detail on the costs of roll maintenance, but pointed out that to distinguish these costs from general infrastructure costs can be misleading. Between elections the divisional structure is primarily occupied with roll maintenance functions, so part of the cost of maintaining this infrastructure should be identified as a roll maintenance cost.

6.1.4 The difficulties in estimating roll costs resulted in the figures being finalised late in the inquiry, sometimes after the public hearing phase had been completed. Important information from the AEC was received by the Committee following the last public hearing, so no opportunity has been available for the States to comment. Nor was it feasible to arrange for professional advice on analysing the figures. The Committee agrees with the AEC's view that caution should be exercised in assessing the results of this part of the inquiry.

6.2 The Cost of the Roll

6.2.1 The AEC's estimate of the direct costs of roll maintenance for 1990-91 was \$9 555 408.¹ In a later submission the AEC estimated that average annual expenditure incurred in maintaining rolls is in the range \$35.7 to \$38.7 million.² This estimate included notional costs for many items not included in the direct costs estimate,

¹ Evidence, p. S880.

² Evidence, p. S1009.

and is shown in Appendix 7.³ The information is summarised in Table 9. In providing this estimate the AEC stressed that the figures should be treated with some caution:

the nature of the AEC's operations, as reflected in its accounting systems, makes it difficult to provide a precise figure for typical 'annual costs'.⁴

6.2.2 Furthermore,

the nature of the AEC's programs is such that this figure includes functions that, while related to enrolment stimulation to not directly pertain to maintaining the electoral roll product.⁵

TABLE 9: Total AEC expenditure on maintaining rolls.

ITEM	COST	RANGE \$M
Direct operational expenses of enrolment	7.0	- 8.5
Amortised capital costs of computer system	0.6	- 0.6
Annualised Divisional staff costs:		
- Enrolment, ongoing	2.3	- 3.0
- Redistribution	1.5	- 1.5
- Electoral Roll Reviews	3.8	- 3.8
Election-generated enrolment activity	1.5	- 1.5
Central & Head office support	2.0	- 2.2
Administrative staff support	1.7	- 1.8
Annualised non-staff administrative support	7.2	- 7.7
Annualised cost of irregular event costs	8.1	- 8.1
TOTALS	\$35.7	- \$38.7

³ Evidence, pp. S1018-19.

⁴ Evidence, p. S1008.

⁵ Ibid.

6.2.3 The staffing costs of roll maintenance in this table should be compared with the total AEC staffing costs set out in Table 3 (para 2.3.6).

6.2.4 The AEC was unable to provide precise information relating to the capital and development costs of the centralised RMANS system. In discussing these costs the AEC noted:

Available records of historic costs do not distinguish between costs of external contractors incurred in developing aspects of the RMANS system, and external contractors' costs for system software operation and maintenance.⁶

and

RMANS was not a system that was developed from a zero base. It drew on existing techniques and structures developed for the earlier COM II system and has used much existing Head Office equipment.⁷

6.3 The Cost of Maintaining 'Parallel' Rolls

6.3.1 In addition to contributing towards the costs of the joint roll, all States incur some additional roll maintenance costs. Victoria and Western Australia use the data collected by the AEC in order to produce their own rolls for State elections and a range of other State purposes. These rolls are maintained separately and are known as 'parallel rolls'.

6.3.2 Costs for maintaining these "parallel" rolls cannot be compared with the AEC's roll maintenance costs, because the States take the initial data from RMANS. Neither can the States' costs be compared with each other because of different operations and requirements.

⁶ Evidence, p. S1010.

⁷ Evidence, p. S1012.

6.3.3 The costs for Victoria's parallel roll fall into three categories:

- maintenance of the system (estimated at \$83 282 per year)
- production costs for specific purposes (\$54 307 for 1990-91), and
- redevelopment costs (\$205 000 - \$235 000, consisting of \$85 000 for a new in-house computer, \$40 000 to upgrade the computer's capacity and \$80 000 - \$110 000 for redevelopment consisting of an analysis of requirements and writing the software).⁸

6.3.4 The AEC disputes the amount estimated by Victoria, and also the adequacy of the products resulting from the parallel roll.⁹ The Victorian Electoral Commissioner has not had an opportunity to respond to this matter.

6.3.5 Western Australia, which also maintains a 'parallel' roll, estimated the cost of all processing of the information received from the AEC relating to roll production, Members' lists, local government rolls and jury lists amongst other items. The total is \$591 000 per annum, including \$270 000 staff costs.¹⁰ The AEC claim this amount is underestimated.¹¹

6.4 Other State Costs

6.4.1 New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania incur some roll costs, even though they do not run parallel rolls.

⁸ Evidence, pp. S729-31.

⁹ Evidence, p. S805.

¹⁰ Evidence, p. S711.

¹¹ Evidence, p. S902.

6.4.2 Queensland has also found it necessary to establish an independent system for jury lists and other roll products. The system cost 'about a quarter of a million dollars' to establish and it will cost \$123 000 a year to run.¹²

6.4.3 All electoral bodies provided the Committee with a figure for the cost of computer services, but it is not known whether the cost of roll products is included in these costs. Accordingly, the figures have not been included in this section.

6.4.4 Tasmania relies on the joint roll but incurs costs for producing the certified lists. This cost \$25 000 for the 1989 election and \$31 000 for the 1992 election.¹³

6.4.5 New South Wales also uses the joint roll for its State roll. Other roll costs incurred by New South Wales include approximately \$100 000 per year towards enrolment cards and other materials,¹⁴ and unspecified costs for its own computer bureau. Additional roll costs for the 1991 election included \$833 000 for producing the certified lists and \$302 000 for roll scanning after the election.¹⁵

6.5 Comparison of Costs of the Centralised System (RMANS) and the Decentralised System (EAGLE)

6.5.1 The inquiry revealed that three States argue strongly that the nation's roll maintenance systems should be decentralised, so that management may be exercised locally. Notably the three States are Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria. In each of those States relatively advanced land based and geographic information systems are in operation or are being developed. The State Commissioners consider that if elector addresses were linked with their

¹² Evidence, p. 470.

¹³ Evidence, p. S872-73.

¹⁴ Evidence, p. S74.

¹⁵ Evidence, p. S1036.

States' land-based systems, both roll maintenance operations and redistribution processes would be facilitated.

6.5.2 As indicated earlier the only fully decentralised roll maintenance system in operation is the EAGLE system used in South Australia. It therefore offers a useful opportunity to compare the only current examples of a decentralised and a centralised data-base. South Australia's costs are followed with some interest by other States considering a decentralised system. Conveniently the joint roll agreement with that State is one of the two most recently negotiated.

6.5.3 Clause 10 of the 1988 South Australian agreement provides that for the year ending 30 June 1992, the State is to pay the Commonwealth the sum of 7.9368 cents per elector (say 8 cents) to cover 50% of the cost of enrolment postage, telephones and storage of forms associated with roll maintenance. All 'other' costs associated with the State-based on-line computer network, including the maintenance of computer programs, data processing, election and redistribution processing and habitation reviews are shared equally.

6.5.4 The AEC estimates that South Australia's share of these 'other' costs are \$666 000 per annum.¹⁶ With approximately 960 000 electors on the South Australian roll, this equates to 69 cents per elector or a total of 77 cents per elector (8 cents plus 69 cents).

6.5.5 This cost of 77 cents per elector covers all products required by the AEC and the State Commission, including local government products, floppy disks for MPs, jury lists, random samples for epidemiological and other surveys etc.

6.5.6 The other State with a current joint roll agreement is Queensland, where the agreement became operational in January 1992.

¹⁶ Exhibits, p.258, No. 26.

Under the terms of this agreement the State is to pay the Commonwealth the sum of 64 cents per elector for the year ending 30 June 1992 (pro rata in relation to the first year of the agreement's operation.)

6.5.7 However, as RMANS is currently unable to supply all products required by the State, the Queensland State Commissioner has established a separate computer system to 'massage' data extracted from RMANS. As reported earlier the cost of establishing that separate system was approximately \$250 000 with estimated annual production/maintenance costs of \$123 000. (paragraph 6.4.2). If the establishment cost is to be amortised over five years then the cost per elector would be approximately 9 cents. The total cost in Queensland is therefore 73 cents per elector (64 cents plus 9 cents).

6.5.8 On the basis of this comparison, the cost of operating the South Australian and Queensland arrangements are only marginally different.

6.5.9 The Committee is aware that the issues raised in an analysis of the costs of roll management, particularly in comparing an (almost) Australia-wide and a State-based system, are highly complex. The Committee has relied on the figures provided by electoral bodies and has not had the services of an accountant or an auditor to help it assess these figures. Caution should therefore be exercised in assessing the analysis outlined above.

6.6 Sharing the Cost

6.6.1 At the conference of senior Australian electoral officers held in South Australia in June 1989, the AEC lodged an agenda paper suggesting that joint rolls agreements should be reviewed annually and

that the 'user pays' principle should apply, with each State contributing half the costs of roll maintenance.

6.6.2 The next annual conference of senior Australian electoral officers was convened in Melbourne in October 1990. At that conference the AEC advised the State Commissioners that the Commonwealth Government considered the States should be making a greater financial contribution towards the maintenance of the joint rolls. The manner by which this information was initially disclosed was outlined in evidence by the recently retired Tasmanian Chief Electoral Officer, who appeared before the Committee in a private capacity:

I used to listen to the media talking about the Loan Council meetings and the Premiers being fairly disgusted about the pieces of paper being shoved under their doors at 6 o'clock, or earlier, in the morning. I finally found out how those Premiers felt, to a certain extent, when attending the national conference as the [Tasmanian] State Chief Electoral Officer in Melbourne (in 1990). We had delivered by some person unknown - placed on the table just outside the room we were using for the conference - a take it or leave it offer from the AEC which said in essence that, 'We have taken over your rolls, we are renegotiating the joint agreement and you are going to pay half.' To my mind that denies even the standard politeness of one person to another, and it surprises me that it happened at that level of administration.¹⁷

6.6.3 The piece of paper to which this witness referred was intended to describe a model for a common roll to be used by the three tiers of government. It was tendered in evidence during the course of the inquiry and is shown at Appendix 6.¹⁸ The elements of a model roll are extracted here:

¹⁷ Evidence, pp. 216-17.

¹⁸ See also Evidence, p. 8544.

- State legislation should embody similar eligibility criteria to that of the Commonwealth or a blanket provision accepting Commonwealth Electoral Act criteria. Where administrative practices need to be legislated these should be as for the Commonwealth;
- a common roll should be on a single database which should be maintained by the AEC and linked to a national system;
- the cost of maintaining the roll, including the cost of habitation reviews, should be equitable (that is, 50 per cent each) shared by the AEC and the State;
- given that State requirements will place additional burdens and complexities on AEC divisional workloads, computerisation of those offices should be pursued. As meeting State requirements would be a significant reason for computerisation, States could be expected to contribute to the capital costs involved as well as to the operating costs.
- a joint management committee consisting of officers from the State electoral authority and the AEC (and local government if appropriate) should be established to ensure that users' needs are met in a cooperative and planned way.

6.6.4 Even if this paper was prepared for no other reason but to encapsulate what the AEC perceived to be an ideal model for future joint roll arrangements, its content and the way it was presented did little to smooth the way for subsequent negotiations on this subject. Indeed, it seems to the Committee that the document and the way it was presented were unnecessarily provocative. In fact there are

several aspects of the model, like uniformity of the franchise, which are the concern of Governments, rather than electoral administrators. It is therefore not surprising that State Commissioners requested that the whole matter of roll maintenance be aired publicly by extending the Committee's terms of reference.

6.6.5 It must be said that until the 1990 conference, the States probably had little reason to initiate discussions or negotiations on their respective joint roll arrangements. All (except South Australia and Queensland), had been receiving roll products from COM (the system before RMANS) and its developing replacement, RMANS, to enable them to satisfy State election requirements. Furthermore, the financial arrangements embodied in those agreements had, through the passage of time, developed in a manner most favourable to the States.

6.6.6 On 7 February 1991, the Prime Minister wrote to the State Premiers/Chief Minister (except South Australia and Queensland) supporting joint roll arrangements but indicating that because of funding imbalances, the Minister for Administrative Services would be asking the AEC to undertake negotiations to obtain equitable sharing of direct costs.

6.6.7 In its initial submission the AEC advised that the current arrangements with New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania are completely one-sided, as those States are making only minimal contributions at present. The Commission added that the contribution made by Western Australia predates on-line computerisation and therefore also requires updating.¹⁹

6.6.8 In summary, the amount being sought from these States is as follows.²⁰

TABLE 10: AEC's claim for 50% of recovery of direct roll maintenance costs, compared with contributions made by States.

State	Amount paid by State 1990-91 \$	Amount of Commonwealth's claim 1991-92 \$
NSW	85 788	2 486 605
VIC	16 678	1 565 289
WA	204 637 approx	464 636
TAS	4 938	218 875

Note: Current contributions by South Australia, Queensland and Northern Territory are considered satisfactory by the AEC.

6.7 State Commissions: Responses to Claims

6.7.1 During the inquiry the AEC claimed that some State Commissions had been slow to react to its claims for greater financial contributions and 'have used the current Joint Standing Committee inquiry as an excuse to delay negotiations for almost a year.'²¹

6.7.2 This was disputed by the Victorian Electoral Commissioner who advised that it was not until 23 August 1991, some six months after the Prime Minister's letter, that the AEC provided details of the sum being sought from that State. He added that upon receiving more detailed information from the AEC in October 1991, consultants were commissioned to advise Victoria on its possible

¹⁹ Evidence, p. S231.

²⁰ Evidence, p. S232.

²¹ Dr R Bell, Evidence, p. S865.

options during negotiations. These consultants completed their report on 28 November 1991.²²

6.7.3 As a matter of public record, details of the AEC's 1991 claim on Victoria for cost sharing of direct roll maintenance costs are as follows:²³

TABLE 11: AEC's claim for 50 per cent of direct roll maintenance costs incurred in Victoria.

ITEM CLAIMED	\$
Enrolment stationery	38 516
ERR (Habitation Reviews)	631 390
RMANS processing	220 960
DAS Bureau overheads	254 220
AEC computer support staff	88 945
State share amortisation computer terminals in divisional & other offices	43 432
Equipment maintenance and telecommunication costs	127 244
Enrolment postage	85 919
Computer consumables	37 537
DRO's joint roll allowance	37 126
TOTAL	1 565 289

6.7.4 In October 1991, the Victorian Electoral Commissioner advised the AEC that it was unlikely his State would want to conclude

negotiations prior to this Committee presenting its report to the Parliament.²⁴

6.7.5 On 7 February 1992, the Western Australian Electoral Commissioner wrote to the AEC advising that several States, including his own, considered that negotiations should be deferred for the same reason.²⁵ That letter indicated 'it may be necessary to await governmental responses to any such recommendations [of the JSCEM] before considering whether any further negotiations should take place.'

6.7.6 Even in the absence of this evidence it would seem that if there is any reluctance or hesitation on behalf of the State Commissions to progress negotiations, this could possibly result from several underlying concerns.

6.7.7 Firstly, as indicated elsewhere, the State Commissioners have expressed the view that although they were advised of proposed extract tape formats they were not afforded an adequate opportunity to participate in the development of RMANS, a system they are now being asked to support financially. More specifically they were not a party to the decisions taken on its development, either initially or when the decentralised computing strategy was aborted after the 1987 Federal elections; nor did they have any influence on program design and development and the decision to superimpose Census Collection Districts (CCDs) on the database. Several State Commissioners claimed that CCDs are of little use for redistribution or other State purposes.

6.7.8 Secondly, there appears to be an underlying concern that if the Commonwealth achieves 50 per cent recovery of direct costs, there is no guarantee that cost sharing attempts will not extend to indirect roll maintenance costs. These might include salary and

²² Evidence, p. S1001.

²³ Exhibit No. 1, pp. 7-8.

²⁴ Evidence, p. S714.

²⁵ Evidence, p. S664.

property costs associated with the divisional network and its support and computer program development costs (unless developed for State purposes only).

6.7.9 Some submissions and witnesses argue that the divisional network is far from the most cost effective structure for collecting raw data needed for roll maintenance. For example, the submission of the Western Australian Minister for Parliamentary and Electoral Reform proposed that if roll maintenance were resumed by the Western Australian Electoral Commissioner it could be handled centrally in that State using only fifteen staff, including two liaison officers; one dealing with MPs' needs, the other dealing with local government requirements.²⁶ The New South Wales Electoral Commissioner suggested that only twenty-five to thirty staff would be required in New South Wales²⁷ and the South Australian Electoral Commissioner considered only ten staff would be required to maintain the rolls for the three tiers of government in that State.²⁸ Details of how, or to what degree of accuracy, the rolls would be maintained by the staff numbers suggested, have not been supplied.

6.7.10 While understanding the legitimate concerns of the States, the Committee supports the continuation of a permanent AEC field structure, and believes that the maintenance of the rolls by the divisional network is an important function of the field structure.

6.7.11 Recommendations 1 to 4 of this report propose improvements to the current structure of the divisional network (paragraphs 2.7.1, 2.7.2, 2.7.3 and 2.9.3). These measures aim at some consolidation of the network through a modified collocation/regionalisation program. While not meeting in full the

wishes of the States, the proposals go some way to meeting their concerns about the costs of maintaining the rolls.

6.7.12 It is the Committee's view that in the event of the Commonwealth attempting to recover indirect costs of roll maintenance, State governments may be inclined, while continuing to support a joint enrolment card, to establish mechanisms for processing these cards themselves and maintaining separate elector databases. Experience of past practices in this area suggests that every endeavour should be made to avoid such a possibility, which would increase the potential for errors and create undesirable confusion and duplication (pp. 96-97)

6.7.13 While it is incumbent upon the AEC to maintain rolls for Commonwealth purposes, which can conveniently be used for state purposes with little extra cost to the Commonwealth, it is reasonable to limit cost recovery to direct costs such as computer processing, joint forms and roll review activities.

6.7.14 It is the Committee's view that the States should not be required to contribute towards the indirect infrastructure costs incurred by the AEC in maintaining the rolls. This belief is shared by the AEC:

Some State Commissioners are critical of the high cost of the divisional office structure, claiming that the structure is inefficient. This may be valid if they were being asked to support it. However, the States are being asked only to contribute towards the cost of telecommunications and some equipment.²⁹

6.7.15 Further clarification of the AECs view of appropriate costs came at the final public hearings in Canberra on 29 May 1992 when Dr Muffet stated:

²⁶ Evidence, p. S279-80.
²⁷ Evidence, p. 360.
²⁸ Evidence, p. 131.

²⁹ Evidence, p. S239.

The Government requires us to negotiate with the States to recover 50 per cent of the direct costs. It has nothing to do with labour, it has nothing to do with consultants who are developing the system, or the DROs ... But in the AEC's view, it does mean that the part of the computer network that the DRO uses should be half paid for by the States.³⁰

6.7.16 In considering elements of the costs of roll maintenance which should be shared by the States, the Committee considers that it would not be appropriate for the Commonwealth to endeavour to obtain sharing of costs incurred in the development of RMANS as that computer system was principally designed to overcome deficiencies in its predecessor COM:

RMANS replaced COM II, a batch processing system, used by the Commission for many years. COM II stored the master files on tape and did not offer an on-line enquiry facility. As well as being difficult to maintain and enhance, it was labour-intensive and needed extensive pre-coding of enrolment forms after reference to microfiches.³¹

6.7.17 The Committee supports the Government's decision to seek recovery of 50 per cent of the direct costs of maintaining the joint roll, from the States concerned. The difficulty lies in determining what constitutes 'direct costs'. This cannot be overcome without adequate communication and consultation. Agreement on a fair share of costs will require the AEC to provide to the States information about all the costs involved in roll maintenance. The detailed breakdown of total costs can then be the basis of consultation with the States on the items to be defined as 'direct costs'.

6.7.18 While negotiations might have to begin from a low base of agreed items, a formula should emerge from the consultations which

would facilitate an easier assessment of future State contributions to joint roll maintenance.

6.7.19

Recommendation 34. The Committee recommends that negotiations to conclude the current round of joint roll agreements should proceed without delay.

6.7.20

Recommendation 35. The Committee recommends that negotiations occur between the Commonwealth and the States/Territory to determine an agreed formula for calculating direct costs of roll maintenance.

6.8 State Views on RMANS Output

6.8.1 The evidence before the Committee includes a number of instances in which State Commissioners claim that the output of RMANS has not been satisfactory. A consideration of the concerns of each State follows.

6.9 New South Wales and RMANS

6.9.1 Unlike Western Australia and Victoria, New South Wales is limited in its ability to test RMANS. The real test comes at election time:

Those States who do have enrolment computer systems enabling errors in RMANS-produced rolls to be identified claim that the

³⁰ Evidence, p. 682.

³¹ AEC Annual Report, 1988/89.

deficiencies show they have a superior system. New South Wales does not possess such a system and has relied entirely on RMANS for State and local government rolls. Some duplications and errors have been identified during the electoral process and more particularly after that when non-voter action is taken.³²

6.9.2 The Electoral Commissioner for New South Wales, Mr Dickson, has claimed that there were a number of errors in the roll for the recent by-election in The Entrance.³³ The Australian Electoral Officer for New South Wales, Mr Nugent, has responded that the number of errors was very small compared with the size of the roll and that a number of instances referred to by Mr Dickson were not enrolment errors at all but reflected inadequacies in the numbering of rural properties.³⁴ Mr Dickson has conceded that Mr Nugent was correct in relation to the rural addresses.³⁵

6.9.3 Mr Dickson has claimed that, under RMANS, he has to wait an extra three or four days after the issue of the writ for the roll to be produced and that to have to wait six or seven days for the roll is unsatisfactory especially when an election period is short.³⁶ The Electoral Commissioner for South Australia has also claimed that it takes seven days to produce rolls under RMANS.³⁷ A reference to seven days appears in the recently negotiated joint roll agreement with Queensland. The AEC has responded by querying Mr Dickson's assertion that, prior to RMANS, he received the rolls on the Monday following a Friday roll close and by pointing out that now that RMANS is on-line the time taken to produce the roll has been significantly reduced.³⁸ The view of the Deputy Electoral Commissioner for New South Wales, Mr J Wasson, is that under RMANS electoral rolls are

provided to New South Wales expeditiously, although in the case of the roll for the Davidson by-election, not without problems.³⁹

6.9.4 Mr Dickson subsequently retracted his comments in relation to by-elections.⁴⁰ The AEC's view is that RMANS can provide the rolls for a general election in New South Wales on the Tuesday after a Friday roll close. The AEC has pointed out that tapes were provided to Queensland within 20 hours of the rolls closing for the referendum of February 1992 and to Western Australia within 18 hours of the roll closing for the referendum of April 1992.⁴¹

6.9.5 Mr Dickson has criticised the street list for the original election in The Entrance.⁴² Inadequacies in the street list can result in voters being given a ballot paper for the wrong electorate. Mr Nugent has pointed out that, in the judgement which voided the election, Mr Justice Slattery was not critical of the street list but rather of the recruitment and training of polling officials.⁴³ Mr Wasson has confirmed this assessment.⁴⁴ However he and Mr Nugent have agreed that it would have been preferable if one description in the street list had been spelt out in more detail.

Despite criticism of the street list by [the State Electoral Office], the judge was not critical of the street list in his judgement and, despite a long list of recommendations, made no mention that there was any need to change the street list.⁴⁵

6.9.6 Mr Wasson has referred to two successive errors in the roll for the recent by-election in Davidson. The errors were quickly corrected and the conduct of the by-election was not affected.⁴⁶

³² Mr J Wasson, Evidence, p. 657.

³³ Evidence, p. 359.

³⁴ Evidence, pp. 431, 586, 5828.

³⁵ Evidence, p. 8436.

³⁶ Evidence, pp. 360-61.

³⁷ Evidence, p. 149.

³⁸ Evidence, pp. 5829 and 432.

³⁹ Evidence, p. 5509, 659.

⁴⁰ Evidence, p. 5436.

⁴¹ Evidence, pp. 5415, 5827.

⁴² Evidence, p. 376.

⁴³ Evidence, pp. 431-32.

⁴⁴ Evidence, pp. 658-59.

⁴⁵ Evidence, p. 431.

⁴⁶ Evidence, pp. 5509-10 and 661.

6.10 Victoria and RMANS

6.10.1 The Electoral Commissioner for Victoria has claimed that the documentation accompanying RMANS tapes supplied to Victoria has often been incomplete or inaccurate. The AEC has admitted to some errors. On the other hand there seems to have been some failure on the part of the State Electoral Office to bring these errors promptly to the attention of the AEC. Given that both sides recognised that there were errors as early as September 1991, it is somewhat surprising that revised procedures had still not been introduced in May 1992.⁴⁷

6.10.2 The AEC has admitted that in 1990 there was a mistake in Victoria in that the addresses of silent electors were not suppressed.⁴⁸

6.10.3 Some of the difficulties Victoria has had with the rolls have involved confusion (or perhaps disagreement) over what the Victorian Electoral Commissioner can expect under the joint roll agreement, which was last updated in 1957, considerably predating RMANS or any other computer system.

6.10.4 Dr Lyons, the Victorian Electoral Commissioner, advised the Committee at the Melbourne public hearings on 10 March 1992 that following the recent redivision of State districts, some 2 000 electors were incorrectly allocated by the AEC. He pointed out the consequences of this error had a State election been held. To address this problem Dr Lyons requested the AEC to provide lists of streets and part streets by subdivision. Dr Lyons informed the Committee that these lists had still not been provided by 24 June 1992.⁴⁹ The

AEC's response was that the task is not covered by the present agreement with Victoria and that such requests have

to be allocated expensive and limited resources ... against a background of many and conflicting priorities ...⁵⁰

6.10.5 This situation is clearly unsatisfactory in terms of proper and efficient electoral roll management for the citizens of Victoria. Whilst there are shared responsibilities for this function the AEC has the prime responsibility for the maintenance of accurate rolls. It highlights the need for an updated agreement between the AEC and Victoria.

6.11 Queensland and RMANS

6.11.1 Mr D O'Shea has referred to errors in the roll. The AEC has responded by pointing out that the boundary data was transferred to RMANS in a very short time so that RMANS could be used for the referendum of February 1992 and that minor errors in four State electorates have subsequently been corrected.⁵¹

6.11.2 Mr O'Shea informed the Committee that the response times of RMANS are slower than under the State system which preceded RMANS.⁵² Nevertheless the performance of RMANS at roll closes appears to have been satisfactory and, despite the large numbers of staff using RMANS at these times, there have been very few complaints.

⁴⁷ Evidence, pp. S405, S439.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Evidence, p. S1000.

⁵⁰ Evidence, p. S834.

⁵¹ Evidence, pp. 480, S836.

⁵² Evidence, p. 477.

6.12 Western Australia and RMANS

6.12.1 The Electoral Commissioner for Western Australia, Mr L Smith, has raised doubts as to whether enrolment information supplied by the AEC is sufficiently accurate to allocate electors to local government wards in rural areas. He told the Committee that between December 1990 and June 1991 there were 674 cases where AEC enrolment information was inadequate for the allocation. From July 1991 to January 1992 there were a further 324 cases.⁵³

6.13 Coding for the Roll and the Use of CCDs

6.13.1 The AEC has confirmed that there have been some problems in the area of coding. However it has pointed to recent improvements in AEC procedures and to AEC initiatives in encouraging local governments to adopt rural road numbering which, if widely introduced, will greatly assist the Commissions in accurately placing rural electors.⁵⁴

6.13.2 The Committee understands that it has been AEC policy for some time to align electors to Census Collection Districts (CCDs).⁵⁵ In States such as New South Wales, where a CCD is split by a ward or riding boundary, the electors are also aligned to wards and ridings. Given that there are far more CCDs than wards and ridings, the additional work involved in aligning to wards and ridings is not great. In the light of the statistics provided by Mr Smith,⁵⁶ it seems that there has been some tardiness in implementing the AEC policy in Western Australia. However, provided that the policy is fully implemented, it should be possible for the AEC to align every rural elector to wards and to provide this information to the Western

⁵³ Evidence, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Evidence, pp. 56-57, S812.

⁵⁵ Evidence, p. S828.

⁵⁶ Evidence, p. 5. See also AEC response p. S812.

Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) as is done in other States. Difficulties are being addressed:

...since the [AEC] in Western Australia aligned all its habitation walks to census collection district boundaries, we certainly have got a new emphasis placed on domiciling electors in their correct location.⁵⁷

6.13.3 The Committee is of the view that the AEC's field structure and the close relationship of many Divisional Returning Officers to municipal officials should be fully utilised.

6.13.4 The AEC currently does encoding to local government level for New South Wales, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Queensland but not for Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania. The Committee believes that there is merit in the AEC extending this to the other States provided agreement can be reached on costs. This would increase the potential for improvement in the integrity of the data for the AEC to encode wards and ridings for all local government areas.

6.13.5

Recommendation 36. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State Commissions in Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania with a view to having the AEC align electors to wards and/or ridings or appropriate local government subdivisions.

⁵⁷ Mr P Smyth, DRO for Moore, Evidence, p. 73.

6.13.6 A number of witnesses have maintained that the alignment of electors to CCDs influences redistribution committees to follow CCD boundaries even where these boundaries are not an accurate reflection of other important factors such as community of interest.⁵⁸ Alignment does not compel redistribution committees to follow CCD boundaries. Indeed it is to be expected that such committees will diverge from CCD boundaries where the redistribution guidelines require.⁵⁹

RMANS uses CCDs as a useful boundary for a whole range of purposes, but it does not depend on CCDs. It can have any boundary you like, in any direction, at any time. The CCDs are there, and they have been very useful to a lot of electoral bodies in redistributions, but it is in no way limiting. You could have administrative boundaries or you could have kindergarten catchment areas; all of them could go into RMANS in an easy simple way.⁶⁰

I repeat that ward boundaries in New South Wales are, for the most part, not aligned to CCDs and some 400 to 500 CCDs are currently split in the RMANS system to produce local government rolls.⁶¹

6.13.7 While redistribution committees are not required to follow CCD boundaries, it is likely that the fact that RMANS is aligned to CCDs will be an inducement to do so, even where CCD boundaries do not reflect factors such as community of interest. The Committee notes that in some cases CCD boundaries appear to be based on obsolete maps.

⁵⁸ Evidence, pp. 38, 140, S645.
⁵⁹ Evidence, pp. 643, S814, S820.
⁶⁰ Evidence, p. 290.
⁶¹ Evidence, p. 434.

6.13.8

Recommendation 37. The Committee recommends that the use of CCD boundaries should be considered as an aid in the redistribution process, but notes that the requirement of relevant Acts demand that other criteria will be the determining factors.

6.14 Duplications on the Roll

6.14.1 Mr Smith stated that there were 4 000 possible duplication errors in the rolls for the 1992 referendum in Western Australia. Subsequent investigations by the AEC and the WAEC indicate that the number of AEC duplications was 561 and there were also a number of duplications on the State roll which were not on the Commonwealth roll. Given that approximately 50 000 claim cards were received shortly before the roll close, this represents an error rate of approximately one per cent.

6.14.2 While any errors are undesirable, the Committee considers that some margin for error is inevitable in view of the overriding considerations of ensuring that all electors are included on the roll and that the rolls are available quickly.⁶²

6.14.3 RMANS has programs which identify duplicate enrolments with a view to their removal from the electoral roll. However it seems that it has not been the practice to run these programs prior to a State electoral event.⁶³

⁶² Evidence, pp. 685, 694, 8475
⁶³ Evidence, pp. 595, 658.

6.14.4 It should be noted that the cost of running the duplication program is soon to rise to \$30 000 per check of the national file and that the program needs two weeks preparation time and at least a further two weeks to follow up the result.⁶⁴ It is clear that the AEC and the States need to consult on cost recovery and the frequency of running these deduplication programs and processes in order to ensure greater accuracy of the rolls for State electoral events.

6.14.5

Recommendation 38. The Committee recommends that, subject to satisfactory arrangements regarding timing and funding, the AEC run the programs for the removal of duplications before all State/Territory electoral events.

6.15 Assessing the Roll

6.15.1 Despite the evidence of some errors, the State Commissioners have conceded that the rolls produced by RMANS are generally of good quality. The Electoral Commissioner for Victoria has said that RMANS is 'technically well designed and implemented'.⁶⁵ In producing electoral rolls perfection is the goal but it is a goal extremely difficult to achieve. The Electoral Commissioner for New South Wales has stated that he has come to expect less than one hundred per cent performance.⁶⁶ The Australian Electoral Officer for New South Wales commented in relation to the roll for the by-election in The Entrance that 99.98 per cent is not a bad effort.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Evidence, p. S928.

⁶⁵ Evidence, p. S360.

⁶⁶ Evidence, p. 371.

⁶⁷ Evidence, p. 431.

6.15.2 While the evidence tendered to the Committee contains many instances of particular problems with the rolls, the overall impression is that the rolls are of a high standard. Some examples of these positive assessments follow:

...none of the States have...said that the electoral rolls that are produced under the RMANS system are not of good quality; indeed they have supported the quality of our product.⁶⁸

*In New South Wales I support the retention of roll collection, maintenance, and production of data by the Commonwealth as a sound, reliable and productive measure that has existed satisfactorily for a number of years.*⁶⁹

...the efforts of the AEC in producing rolls of the calibre used at the 1991 general election [in New South Wales], so shortly after redistribution, is worthy of much praise. Similarly, the rolls...used in the 1991 local government elections were of a high standard.⁷⁰

We have never had any problems with the provision of rolls at the time of elections. When the roll closure comes, the cooperation has been excellent.⁷¹

We did have a direct mail-out to all electors in the Geraldton by-election in April 1990 and the Floreat by-election also which tended to show that the rolls maintained by the Commonwealth and the State were fairly accurate.⁷²

...generally [RMANS] satisfies our requirements.⁷³

The development of RMANS, particularly in the last couple of years, has emphasised inherent quality in the data and the roll itself.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Mr B Cox, Australian Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, p. 312.

⁶⁹ Mr I Dickson, New South Wales Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, p. S65.

⁷⁰ Mr J Wesson, Acting New South Wales Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, p. 861.

⁷¹ Mr L Smith, Western Australian Electoral Commissioner, p. 15.

⁷² Mr L Smith, Evidence, p. 26.

⁷³ Mr C Phillips, Northern Territory Chief Electoral Officer, Evidence, p. 160.

⁷⁴ Mr D Farrell, Evidence, p. 198.

I really want to say that the AEC's performance in producing rolls for the State of Victoria at the time of State elections and by-elections has been most satisfactory.⁷⁵

6.15.3 Despite these positive overall assessments of the roll, many instances of inaccuracies have been brought to the attention of the Committee. Many of these have been in relation to miscoding of electors.⁷⁶ Several witnesses have argued that, as the service provider, the AEC is an easy target for criticism in relation to the rolls. The State Commissions by contrast provide little by way of input to the rolls and are therefore much less open to criticism.⁷⁷

6.15.4 The performance of State electoral authorities in producing electoral rolls in the recent past also needs to be kept in mind. The Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia has pointed to statistics from 1983 which was the last occasion when the State collected and produced a separate roll. At the 1983 elections there were 44 000 more electors on the Commonwealth roll and 70 000 more voted at the Commonwealth elections. There were 57 000 section votes for the State and 7,000 for the Commonwealth. At the subsequent State election, after joint rolls had been introduced, State section votes fell to about 7 000.

6.15.5 Similar statistics could be found for Queensland and for the Tasmanian Legislative Council.⁷⁸ Mr O'Shea said that the Commonwealth roll was superior to the old Queensland roll.⁷⁹ The Queensland Electoral and Administrative Review Commission concluded that 'the Commonwealth roll, as administered by the AEC, offers significant advantages over the State roll on the criteria of integrity and accuracy'.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Dr G Lyons, Victorian Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, p. 253.

⁷⁶ Evidence, pp. 880-81.

⁷⁷ Evidence, p. 433.

⁷⁸ Evidence, pp. 275, S238, S832-33.

⁷⁹ Evidence, p. 470.

⁸⁰ Electoral and Administrative Review Commission Report on Queensland Joint Electoral Roll Review, October 1990, p. 31.

6.15.6 The inferiority of the separate State rolls in the three States was widely recognised and it is for this reason and for reasons of cost and duplication that the three States have progressively abandoned the separate rolls over the last ten years.⁸¹ In the case of Queensland the decision was taken after an extensive inquiry by the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission.⁸² The Commission's view was that RMANS has the capacity to satisfy Queensland's electoral roll needs⁸³ and expressed 'significant reservations' about the separate systems which were advocated by some State officials.⁸⁴ The Committee notes that in recent weeks the Tasmanian Parliament has moved to abandon the separate claim card for the Legislative Council which is a significant step in the direction of a joint roll.

6.15.7 Nor have the parallel rolls kept by the State Electoral Commissions in Western Australia since 1983 and in Victoria since 1988 been free from problems. In 1990 the parallel roll in Western Australia was the subject of comment by the State Auditor-General and the Nash report highlighted the dangers of the State making extensive changes to the Commonwealth roll.⁸⁵ Following these reports the Western Australian Electoral Commission has greatly reduced the extent to which it queries information supplied by RMANS. This change in policy would seem to amount to an acceptance that the data supplied by RMANS is basically sound. The AEC certainly believes this to be the case.⁸⁶

6.15.8 The Committee concludes that the weight of evidence supports the view that while imperfect, the roll is of a standard and is more accurate than it would be if data collection reverted to the States.

⁸¹ Evidence, p. S813.

⁸² EARC, op.cit.

⁸³ Ibid, paragraphs 4.7 and 7.1.

⁸⁴ Evidence, pp. 17, 228, 589.

⁸⁵ Evidence, pp. S818-17.

This is not to say that the roll cannot be improved. The AEC should renew its efforts to uphold the accuracy of the roll.

6.15.9

Recommendation 39. With regard to the errors brought to the attention of the inquiry, the Committee recommends that the AEC conduct a thorough review of its procedures giving particular attention to quality controls for the output of RMANS.

6.16 Consultation

6.16.1 Of more concern to the Committee are statements by some State Commissioners that the AEC does not consult them adequately about policy and procedures relating to the electoral roll which is used for State purposes at least as much as for Commonwealth.

6.16.2 State Commissioners stated that RMANS was set up without consultation with the States.⁸⁶ The AEC maintain that the tenor of submissions and evidence implying that it resisted efforts to consult on the development of RMANS is incorrect.⁸⁷ The AEC set forth all the occasions on which consultation occurred and provided a list of relevant dates. While there obviously was communication with the States on roll management, the list contains a significant gap between September 1987, when a brief on the proposed roll management communications network was sent to the States, and

⁸⁶ For example, Dr G Lyons, Evidence, p. 258.
⁸⁷ Evidence, p. S514.

October 1990 when elements of a model roll were outlined to the joint AEC/State Commissioners' conference.⁸⁸

6.16.3 With the benefit of hindsight it would have been much better had both the AEC and the States exhibited a greater interest in the joint development of the RMANS system, particularly in the period 1987 to 1990.

6.16.4 The following convey the flavour of the evidence given on the subject of consultation:

I was not involved in the early development of RMANS. It really was in a separate part of the world. There was not a great deal of consultation apart from the actual tapes that were transferred to the States, as far as I'm aware...When I took over the role of Director of Enrolment Section in 1989, I had a very clear priority of getting RMANS to a state where it could efficiently run the roll for the 1990 election. I had a single purpose. There was little consultation, it was just a matter of getting on with the job.⁸⁹

...I would guess, from my recollection, that there was not a major formal process [of consultation with the States] undergone before the development of RMANS. That was partly because, in those days, there was not the same sort of pressure from the States for developments of the system which one could reasonably expect to anticipate in an environment of equitable cost sharing, which we are now trying to move towards.⁹⁰

6.16.5 The Electoral Commissioner for New South Wales stated that as a result of lack of consultation, the State had to spend \$60 000 to modify programs for labels for MPs and jury lists.⁹¹ The AEC has

⁸⁸ Evidence, p. S517.
⁸⁹ Mr J Farrell, speaking as a private citizen and former AEC employee, Evidence, p. 201.
⁹⁰ Mr M Maley, AEC employee, Evidence, p. 327.
⁹¹ Evidence, pp. 366, 278, S648.

responded that it had not previously been advised of this problem and that the cost of the modifications appears to have been excessive.⁹²

6.16.6 The Western Australian Electoral Commissioner has complained of changes to procedures relating to RMANS without the States being consulted.⁹³ On the other hand he has also given evidence of recent improvements in consultative mechanisms with the AEC.⁹⁴ The Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia has pointed to the AEC's efforts to accommodate the State including a delay in the introduction of RMANS in Western Australia until after the 1989 State election.⁹⁵ The Australian Electoral Commissioner has referred to a similar case where the introduction of on-line processing for RMANS was delayed to accommodate the roll close for the recent referendum on daylight saving in Western Australia.⁹⁶

6.16.7 The Committee's conclusion is that whatever the merits of this debate there is clear evidence that consultation, especially in the early stages of the development of RMANS, has been demonstrably inadequate. On occasions the AEC has been slow to bring important changes to the attention of the States. There is also evidence of some of the States failing to draw difficulties to the attention of the AEC. The hearings of this inquiry include a number of instances of AEC officers being taken by surprise by the claims of some of the States.⁹⁷

Cooperation is built on trust and understanding. One of the problems there is that when people feel that they have been fed tall stories or not warned of things, which may look like nothing but tactics, that tends to undermine trust and lead to feeling that you do not have understanding.⁹⁸

⁹² Evidence, pp. S601, S830.

⁹³ Evidence, pp. 4 and 15.

⁹⁴ Evidence, pp. 4, 5, 6, 15.

⁹⁵ Evidence, p. 57.

⁹⁶ Evidence, p. 319.

⁹⁷ Evidence, pp. 336, 431, 586 and S601.

⁹⁸ Dr R Bell, Evidence, p. 584.

6.16.8 Criticism of RMANS from some States has become much more strident since the States were asked to increase their financial contributions.⁹⁹ However it seems to the Committee that this was to be expected.

6.16.9 The Committee notes that AEC computer resources have been fully committed and that some States have not been willing to make a financial contribution in return for their requests being given a higher priority.¹⁰⁰

6.16.10 As with criticism of the quality of the product, the service provider is much more open to being accused of lack of consultation than the receiver.

I think the problem always is in interpreting what consultation and listening mean. If somebody says A, B and C and they get A and B, this is forgotten. If they do not get C, they say 'You're not listening and you don't understand my problems'.¹⁰¹

6.16.11 However a fundamental point remains. The AEC was the service provider and the initiatives were, or should have been, taken by it. In the Committee's view, this placed the onus to consult on the AEC. The Committee is also of the view that the consultation that was in fact initiated by the AEC was not adequate.

6.16.12 Another point of concern to the Committee relates to some of the attitudes which appear to be held in the AEC, which do not lend themselves to genuine consultation and cooperation.

6.16.13 The following interchange at a public hearing related to the new formal consultative arrangements in Queensland:

⁹⁹ Evidence, pp. 319, S412.

¹⁰⁰ Dr R Bell, Evidence, p. S438.

¹⁰¹ Professor C Hughes, Evidence, p. 493.

Dr Muffet-It confers, if nothing else, a formal right for the State Commissioner to put a point of view to the AEO, and therefore to the Commission, as to what he wants or does not want with regard to any of the roll arrangements that exist within the State.

...

CHAIRMAN-Dr Muffet, can I say having read it [the Queensland Joint Roll Agreement] that it struck me that it provided the power, if indeed power is the correct word, to make a point of view known.

Dr Muffet-That is not an insignificant power, incidentally.

CHAIRMAN-That is an interesting assessment which you make.¹⁰²

6.17 Joint Management Committees

6.17.1 During the inquiry a number of suggestions have been made to improve this situation. An example is the AEC's suggestion that a joint management committee, similar to that currently existing in Queensland, be set up in each State. Such a proposal would be a formalisation of the informal consultative arrangements which already exist.¹⁰³

6.17.2 The proposal is not new. In a letter to Dr G Lyons dated 11 December 1990, Mr Cox wrote:

A management committee for each State and Territory is envisaged. Perhaps this would consist of the AEO, the AEC Director of Roll Maintenance and one other person representing the AEC while there would be the State Commissioner and two others representing the State. Experts could be brought in for advice when required... It is the AEC's desire that problems of policy and administration relating to rolls be put out on the table.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Evidence, pp. 322-23.

¹⁰³ Evidence, pp. 322, 5417.

¹⁰⁴ Evidence, p. 8534.

6.17.3 It is too early to judge how well the joint management committee in Queensland will work. However, given the difficulties which seem to have arisen, a formal arrangement in all States would seem to be preferable to the current situation.

6.17.4 A joint management committee should be established in each State in order to provide a formal consultative mechanism which could facilitate problem solving at the State level. The Committees should be an important step in promoting a management approach to the roll - a need identified by Dr Lyons, the Victorian Electoral Commissioner:

What I think we therefore need is some sort of vision coming from the AEC and/or the States regarding the components of an accurate roll: where are the real problems; what are the priorities for addressing those problems; what are the costs of addressing those problems? At the moment I do not think we are getting that management approach to the roll.¹⁰⁵

6.17.5 While the major function of a joint management committee should be to confer on the electoral roll, it should also be used as a forum for other matters. The terms of reference of the joint management committees should include managing the electoral roll and resource sharing in conducting Commonwealth and State elections.

6.17.6

Recommendation 40. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to setting up a joint management committee in each State/Territory.

¹⁰⁵ Evidence, p. 642.

6.17.7

Recommendation 41. The Committee recommends that the terms of reference of the joint management committees include roll maintenance, resource sharing and the conduct of elections in the State/Territory concerned.

6.17.8

Recommendation 42. The Committee recommends that the joint management committees consist of the Electoral Commissioner and the Deputy Electoral Commissioner or their respective nominees and the Australian Electoral Officer and the Deputy Australian Electoral Officer or their respective nominees for the State/Territory concerned.

6.18 A Joint Roll Council

6.18.1 A number of State Commissioners have pointed out that, however harmonious and productive the joint management committees are, ultimate control of the electoral roll remains in Canberra.

The AEC has control of the roll and its policies dominate the methods, procedures and decisions as to who goes on the roll, the timing of the roll and who comes off the roll. The joint management committee, from my point of view, can do no more than influence the way the roll is maintained. If there are policies with which I do not agree, I can do no more than exert some influence at that joint management committee as to how those changes should be made. I

have no statutory or, by agreement, power to interfere in any way in the decisions that are made as to how the roll is kept.¹⁰⁶

6.18.2 The AEC has suggested that there be a consultative council on the electoral roll.

The main purpose of the council would be to provide a consultative mechanism for the parties...to discuss the development of priorities in the longer term management of the national electoral database. It is envisaged that such a body would concern itself with strategic planning for the national database including broad priorities for software development, standards for connecting databases and so on.¹⁰⁷

I see [the Consultative Council] very much as an umbrella organisation for dealing with major strategy and major policy issues, not day-to-day nitty-gritty. Secondly, it is a safety valve for things that cannot be resolved locally or at a technical level.¹⁰⁸

6.18.3 The Victorian Electoral Commissioner has put forward a more radical suggestion; the setting up of an Australian Electoral Roll Authority (AERA). AERA would consist of the eight Commissioners and would report to a Ministerial Council. It would be responsible for the management of the roll, the setting of national standards of data integrity and the production of rolls for elections.¹⁰⁹

6.18.4 Although AERA would have functions and powers beyond consultation, Dr Lyons can see some value in the proposed consultative council:

The consultative council would be a good step. At the moment we do not have a sensible forum to discuss roll management matters, and one very useful product of this inquiry is that we may get such a

¹⁰⁶ Mr D O'Shea, Evidence, p. 466.

¹⁰⁷ Mr B Cox, Australian Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, p. 466.

¹⁰⁸ Dr R Bell, Acting Australian Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, pp. 684-85.

¹⁰⁹ Evidence, pp. 646, 8382.

forum. But I think there are reasons for moving beyond the consultative council to something like a national roll authority.¹¹⁰

6.18.5 The Committee gave careful consideration to the AERA proposal, but concluded that a National consultative council with broad terms of reference would be a more desirable and practical body than AERA. The council would address the most pressing problem of a perceived lack of consultation between the AEC and the States, in a forum which would be simple to establish in comparison with AERA.

6.18.6 There are some difficulties with the AERA proposal. In each State the existing two electoral authorities would in effect be replaced by three.¹¹¹ It is likely that on at least some important matters the wishes of the Commonwealth would be overruled. It is equally likely that on occasions the wishes of some States would be overruled by other States. It is expected that this problem will not arise with the Council proposed by the Committee which should take a more consultative and consensus approach to difficulties.

6.18.7 One State Commissioner had concerns about AERA. The potential for a roll authority to cut across the accountability of Electoral Commissioners has been identified as a potential problem:

... this suggestion in some of the submissions that there be a national electoral roll authority we have a little difficulty with. We probably have not come to a concluded view on it, but I can see some difficulty in that cutting across the accountability of electoral commissioners and their statutory responsibilities for the conduct of elections and for maintenance of rolls.¹¹²

6.18.8 A further difficulty with the AERA proposal is that the speed of change is likely to be determined by the most cautious and

conservative of the Electoral Commissioners. The proposal whereby any Commissioner would be able to refer disagreed items to the Ministerial Council would be likely to lead to further delays. The establishment of AERA would be likely to entail lengthy negotiations on matters such as the sale of RMANS to AERA, ongoing State financial contributions and the lines of responsibility of the Divisional Returning Officers.

6.18.9 The Committee's view is that the enhanced consultative mechanisms of the State Joint Management Committees and a National consultative council has much merit.

6.18.10

Recommendation 43. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to establishing an Australian Joint Roll Council (AJRC).

6.19 Membership of the Australian Joint Roll Council

6.19.1 In discussing membership of a hypothetical single electoral commission, Mr Cox, the Australian Electoral Commissioner, proposed that it comprise the seven Electoral Commissioners and the Australian Electoral Officers in each State, with the Australian Electoral Commissioner as chairman.¹¹³ From comments made by Dr Bell on the link between financial commitment and influence,¹¹⁴ it seems that the AEC would also support this membership model for the proposed AJRC.

¹¹⁰ Evidence, p. 640.

¹¹¹ Evidence, pp. 446 and 593.

¹¹² Mr L Smith, Western Australian Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, p. 27.

¹¹³ Evidence, pp. 324, 5418.

¹¹⁴ Evidence, p. 689.

6.19.2 There are differing opinions on whether the seven State Australian Electoral Officers should have membership of the council. The South Australian Electoral Commissioner has pointed to the impracticality of including all AEOs:

If you took the AEOs out of your consultative body then I think they would be starting to get ... the sorts of numbers that we could deal with. You are talking about eight people being able to make a decision, but 17 or 18 people could not... I think the quality of our conferences over the last few years has actually deteriorated with the introduction of the AEOs because there is too much cross-talk and so on. It was a lot more productive ... when we just had the commissioners and deputies.¹¹⁵

6.19.3 Mr Farrell drew attention to the influence the AEC would have if AEOs were included in the Council membership:

I would welcome the State AEOs being present at the council – all or some of them. But I am concerned that that would diffuse the influence that the State Commissioners and I may have on the body.¹¹⁶

6.19.4 The Committee is inclined to agree. Presumably most of the issues placed on the agenda of the AJRC would have received prior consideration on one or more of the State joint management committees. At the same time there may be matters on which it would be sensible to consult with relevant State AEOs.

6.19.5

Recommendation 44. The Committee recommends that the AJRC consist of the Electoral Commissioners from each State and Territory, the Australian Electoral Commissioner and the Deputy Australian Electoral Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner responsible for enrolment in the AEC.

6.19.6

Recommendation 45. The Committee further recommends that, when an issue affects one State/Territory only, the Australian Electoral Officer concerned be coopted to the AJRC for that agenda item only.

6.20 The Role of the Australian Joint Roll Council

6.20.1 The proposed Australian Joint Roll Council would complement and extend the State based joint management committees. Like the committees, a Joint Roll Council need not be restricted to addressing only matters arising from the joint roll. Members of the Council would be able to use the forum in order to discuss other matters of mutual interest.

6.20.2 But the chief function of the AJRC would be to consider the development of RMANS and other matters relating to the joint roll. More technical matters could also be referred to the AJRC where it was not possible to achieve resolution on bodies such as the State

¹¹⁵ Evidence, p. 689.
¹¹⁶ Evidence, p. 681.

based joint management committees or between the technical officers of the Commissions.

6.20.3

Recommendation 46. The Committee recommends that the terms of reference of the Australian Joint Roll Council include the development and maintenance of the joint roll and other electoral matters which have significance for more than one electoral administration.

6.20.4 In this context the Committee notes that intergovernmental meetings already take place in the form of the annual conference of senior Commonwealth and State electoral officials.

6.20.5 Some State submissions have pointed out that, however effective the joint management committees may be, in the final analysis they could be overruled. The same point can be made about the proposed AJRC.

6.20.6 Dr Lyons identified this problem in his AERA proposal:

We have some reservations about the consultative council but, as I have said, it is a useful first step. The AEC is still very much in the driving seat. It is talking about consultation but I would be worried that there would be matters that would be dealt with by the AEC where consultation, in the States' view, would be required but the States would not get to hear about those matters. Perhaps I am being a bit too negative.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Evidence, pp. 639-40.

6.20.7 Against this it can be said that if the Electoral Commissioner and the Australian Electoral Officer for a particular State agree that a certain action is desirable, it would seem highly likely that the AEC in Canberra would agree. It seems even more likely that the AEC would follow the consensus of the States on the AJRC.¹¹⁸ As Dr Bell noted:

... when a council like that discusses important issues and reaches some sort of view, by and large most people go along with it. You ignore conclusions and discussions like that at your peril and you are very vulnerable, at least in a public service environment, to criticism for ignoring things that have reached a level of consensus.¹¹⁹

6.21 A Ministerial Council

6.21.1 It has been noted that there is no meeting of Commonwealth and State Electoral Ministers. Professor Hughes noted that the absence of an annual conference of Electoral Ministers was 'a curious but significant omission from the political calendar'.¹²⁰ In commenting on the lack of a Ministerial Council at a public hearing he stated:

but there are such advantages in cooperative arrangements in saving money that one would have thought somebody would have floated that kite at least.¹²¹

6.21.2 An initiative has recently been taken by the Western Australian Minister in this respect. In the Committee's view such meetings are desirable and could be used, for instance, to discuss matters that are not resolved by the AJRC.

¹¹⁸ Evidence, p. 332.

¹¹⁹ Evidence, p. 685.

¹²⁰ Evidence, p. 8425.

¹²¹ Evidence, p. 496.

Recommendation 47. The Committee recommends that the Minister for Administrative Services approach his State/Territory colleagues to propose the establishment of a Ministerial Council on electoral matters.

6.21.4 The Committee notes that considerable differences remain between the States, and between some States and the Commonwealth in respect to the franchise. For example, the South Australian legislation provides for voluntary first-time enrolment and allows all prisoners to vote. On the other hand there is no provision for itinerant electors, eligible overseas electors and Antarctic electors. Electors who do not advise their changes of addresses are disenfranchised at State elections. Similar examples could be given for other States. The Committee suggests that the Ministerial Council could examine such variations in the franchise with a view to their elimination as far as possible.

6.21.5 The Committee has also considered the possibility of expanding the Australian Electoral Commission to four by adding a State Commissioner. Each State Commissioner could serve for one year on a rotating basis. This proposal would provide the States with a further opportunity to contribute to policy on the electoral rolls at a national level. It would also provide a direct vehicle through which any ongoing communication and consultation problems could be addressed.

6.21.6 Whilst not recommending such a change in this report, the Committee considers that the proposal has merit and should be considered by the Ministerial Council.

Recommendation 48. The Committee recommends that the Ministerial Council consider the desirability of an extra appointment to the Australian Electoral Commission to be filled by State/Territory Commissioners in rotation, and review this matter from time to time.

6.21.8 Having regard to problems which have occurred between the AEC and State Commissions, and the less than satisfactory conduct of the AEC with its client groups, relationships between the AEC and State Commissions should be kept under review by the Ministerial Council over the next couple of years.

6.22 The Provision of Roll Services under Contract

6.22.1 The AEC has suggested that the supply of roll products to the States could be the subject of formal contracts.¹²²

Nowadays...there is much more familiarity with having contracts between agencies- clearly defined interagency agreements which cover what is to be provided, when it is to be provided, detailed specifications, costs, fallback positions and any emergency arrangements. Contracts are far more flexible than intergovernmental arrangements, which are necessarily very ponderous to change.¹²³

6.22.2 A number of State Commissioners have expressed support for the proposal.¹²⁴ The Committee is attracted to the proposal in

¹²² Evidence, p. 692.

¹²³ Evidence, p. 692.

¹²⁴ Evidence, pp. 638, 680.

that it would provide certainty about what is to be produced and the cost involved as well as allowing for some remedy if the product was not satisfactory. The proposal is especially attractive in the current circumstances in which States are making many requests which are outside the terms of the current agreements. Many of these agreements pre-date RMANS, and indeed, computers. It is hardly surprising that services provided via such antiquated vehicles are the subject of misunderstandings and difficulties. It seems that the current situation where the AEC and the State Commissions are, to a large degree, operating in a vacuum with regard to written agreements has contributed to the difficulties which have become evident during this inquiry. Contracts may well be preferable to attempting to renegotiate the current antiquated agreements in a number of States.

6.22.3

Recommendation 49. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the State/Territory Commissions with a view to setting out the arrangements for the provision of roll products to the States/Territories in formal contracts. These negotiations should occur in the context of a review of the Joint Roll Agreements.

6.22.4 The Committee notes that the AEC is moving towards the provision of service desks for the States in the enrolment area of central office. While the Committee finds it somewhat surprising that such a step was not taken earlier, it commends this initiative.¹²⁵

6.22.5 The AEC has also proposed a States user group to operate at a technical level and advise on the development of RMANS. The Committee supports this proposal.

6.23 RMANS Compared with a Decentralised Database

6.23.1 A major issue in the evidence before the Committee is whether RMANS should be replaced by a decentralised database. Under a decentralised database the electoral roll for each State would be held in the State capital concerned. It might be managed either by the AEC or by the State Commissions or jointly by the State Electoral Commissioner and the Australian Electoral Officer concerned. Interstate transfers would be effected by some form of interlinking of the seven State systems.

6.23.2 The major argument in favour of a decentralised database is that it would be locally managed and would therefore be more responsive to local needs and more specifically the needs of the State Commissions. The Committee has been given an example of the problems inherent in a centralised system by Dr Lyons. In January 1992, after a mail-out to 1.1 million Victorian electors, it transpired that about 2 000 of them had been wrongly coded. While the AEC accepted responsibility for that, did not give the sort of priority required by Dr Lyons, to a solution to the problem.¹²⁶ This particular problem resulted in some debate, executed through submissions to this inquiry, with the AEC claiming the provision of lists of streets and part-streets by State subdivision (as a checking methodology) was not included in the Joint Roll Arrangement with Victoria¹²⁷ and Dr Lyons maintaining that the original 1953 Arrangement has been modified by subsequent documentation and

¹²⁵ Evidence, pp. 694-95, 8418.

¹²⁶ Evidence, pp. 259-60.
¹²⁷ Evidence, p. 8334.

practices.¹²⁸ Dr Lyons has since confirmed that the street and part-street lists he required for checking the coding were finally provided in late June 1992. Dr Lyons' assessment of the episode was:

AEC priorities are dominating. The view that it is the AEC roll is dominating. Important State interests in this particular instance are being seriously compromised.¹²⁹

6.23.3 Other virtues have been claimed for a decentralised database including greater accountability, the encouragement of consultation and more immediate control. Mr G Trinder, a computer consultant who has advised Western Australia and Victoria, is a proponent of the benefits of decentralised systems:

*In my view [a decentralised database] has advantages of accountability to everybody concerned. It promotes consultation between the two bodies and enables both organisations not only to have a say in the way that things develop but also to have an influence on the way they develop, without there being any significant overheads imposed on them from outside their own requirements.*¹³⁰

Having two organisations in the same city responsible for [the electoral roll], they can meet on a weekly basis at no cost and they can make decisions jointly. It actually facilitates cooperation and coordination. When you have something run out of Canberra, for whatever reason, you automatically have a problem.¹³¹

I was just arguing for distributed databases where we can determine our priorities as far as the State is concerned so that we do not have to run slap bang against a Federal election when we have just set the date for a redistribution to take place...¹³²

¹²⁸ Evidence, p. S998.

¹²⁹ Evidence, p. 260.

¹³⁰ Mr G Trinder, Evidence, p. 31.

¹³¹ Mr G Trinder, Evidence, p. 49.

¹³² Mr A Becker, South Australian Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, p. 141.

6.23.4 A further argument for a decentralised database for the roll is that centralised systems in general are declining in popularity:

A lot of my comments are based on twenty-five years in the industry and seeing systems go from centralised systems, when that was what technology dictated, through to now, where that is not the way the industry is going and that is not the way systems are being built. The mining companies are all decentralising, devolving responsibility closer to where the users are.¹³³

6.23.5 Mr Trinder told the Committee that other drawbacks of centralised systems include the fact that they encourage centralised decision making and forced involvement¹³⁴ and that they are expensive:

In the case of RMANS, AEC data shows that the IBM operating costs and processing charges are well in excess of what smaller, more effective systems would cost.¹³⁵

6.23.6 Mr Farrell agrees that centralised systems based on mainframes are outmoded, but considers that new technologies such as large minicomputers could run centralised systems more effectively than mainframes. He does not wish to abandon RMANS because mainframe environments are being overtaken by improved technologies:

*RMANS is on an IBM mainframe system ... mainframes and IBM environments are dinosaurs and they are being phased out...*¹³⁶

6.23.7 He foresaw the transfer of the RMANS program to a large minicomputer:

¹³³ Mr G Trinder, Evidence, p. 60.

¹³⁴ Evidence, p. S623

¹³⁵ Evidence, p. S628.

¹³⁶ Mr D Farrell, Evidence, p. 227.

... I would see that within two or three years a large minicomputer could be bought for less than the cost of one year's payment to the DAS bureau. That would be controlled by the single body and the costs of maintaining the roll would drop out of the sky.¹³⁷

6.23.8 The AEC, no doubt relying on the expert opinion of its own computer consultants, provided the Committee with a detailed critique of Mr Trinder's submission (number 80). In its submission (number 94) the AEC pointed out that Mr Trinder had failed to provide evidence for his views on the benefits of a decentralised system, and that the latter would have its own problems.

6.23.9 From the AEC's point of view an important argument against a decentralised database is that central control would be lessened. To meet any Commonwealth request there would need to be liaison with the seven State systems. The speed of responses would inevitably be less. From the Commonwealth's viewpoint, enhancements to the system are also likely to be more difficult.

6.23.10 It is likely that there would be difficulties in ensuring that the seven systems remained synchronised.¹³⁸ Even Mr G Trinder foresaw that problems might arise in this area. While discussing the role of a 'National Roll Management Organisation' in managing a State based (decentralised) system, he noted:

It will need to be recognised that over time the State based systems may diverge in terms of both the common modules and the 'add on' modules which reflect individual needs. This needs to be managed to ensure the connectivity of the systems is not compromised and that service level agreements can be maintained.¹³⁹

6.23.11 Mr Trinder recognised that management of a decentralised system would require a high level of cooperation within the 'peak' body overseeing it:

For it to be successful there will need to be significantly more cooperation and consultation between the various participating states and the AEC.¹⁴⁰

6.23.12 Although Mr Trinder considers that the need for close consultation is in fact an advantage, his comments concede the potential difficulties in this area. The Committee is not convinced that the necessary level of consultation and goodwill would automatically and consistently be achieved.

6.23.13 The centralised versus decentralised debate also touches on the issue of interstate transfers, estimated to be about six per cent of total enrolment changes.¹⁴¹ Under RMANS these are effected instantaneously and are subject to highly developed 'fuzzy matching' procedures. Under a decentralised system there would need to be regular exchanges of data or tapes between the seven systems. There has been much argument as to whether such exchanges are technically feasible and about the relative efficiency of RMANS and a decentralised system in this respect. It is significant that Mr Trinder has doubts about the interstate exchange of data under a decentralised system.

But I do not dismiss the idea of there needing to be somebody centrally to coordinate that and make it work effectively. It is a bit premature to have seven State systems connected electronically...From my experience I do not think the maturity of the IT people in the various Commissions could support that sort of environment at the moment.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Mr D Farrell, Evidence p. 228.

¹³⁸ Mr B Nugent, AEC for New South Wales, Evidence, pp. 445-6.

¹³⁹ Evidence, p. 5634.

¹⁴⁰ Evidence, p. 8628.

¹⁴¹ Evidence pp 318 and 319.

¹⁴² Evidence, p. 52.

6.23.14 Most of the problems of the roll which have been brought to the attention of this inquiry have related to the interface between RMANS and the parallel systems in Victoria and Western Australia. This does not bode well for a decentralised system which would involve multiple interfaces between seven or eight systems.

6.23.15 It has been claimed in evidence that a decentralised system would be cheaper than RMANS.¹⁴³ In canvassing the matter of costs the Committee found the evidence to be inconclusive. If, as would seem inevitable, each of the individual States retained the power to spend in order to enhance the system, it is difficult to see how total costs would not be greater under a decentralised system. There is also the cost of developing the decentralised system in the first place and keeping its various components synchronised.¹⁴⁴

6.23.16 Whilst the Committee is inclined to the view that a national centralised data base is preferable, it recognises the need for further investigation on this question. Specifically the Committee is not in a position to recommend RMANS as against either another centralised database or a decentralised database. The question involves complex and interrelating issues of technology and cost. However because of the large cost of the respective enrolment systems and the competing interests involved, this is a question which needs to be examined further.

6.23.17

Recommendation 50. The Committee recommends that the AJRC undertake an inquiry into the advantages of a centralised as against a decentralised database.

¹⁴³ Evidence, pp. 33, 34, 46, 615 and 8630.

¹⁴⁴ Evidence, p. 281.

6.23.18 The inquiry would need to be substantially independent of the Electoral Commissions and their consultants and would need to have the best advice on costs and technology. The States should pay half the costs of the inquiry.

6.24 Keeping the Roll Accurate – Statutory Requirements

6.24.1 Section 92 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* requires the AEC to attempt to cleanse and update the rolls in each State and Territory at least once every two years by arranging for each habitation to be visited, where, in the opinion of the Commission, it is practicable to do so.

6.24.2 The Commonwealth Act also contemplates that there may be occasions where it is desirable to conduct two or more reviews during each period of two years. In these circumstances subsection 5 of section 92 prescribes that at least one shall be conducted 'in the period of eighteen months expiring on the expiry of the House of Representatives by effluxion of time; or a period of 12 months, being a period that the Commission declares,... to be a period that is likely to precede a [Federal] redistribution in that State or Territory'.

6.25 Methodology

6.25.1 In order to conduct electoral roll reviews (ERR), otherwise known as habitation reviews, the AEC through its network of divisional returning offices engages more than 2 500 casual staff to visit and door-knock almost every dwelling throughout the country. Where it is impracticable to arrange door-knocks, electoral agents, who are usually postal officers, officers of local courts or police officers, are

appointed to provide information about elector movements. In some cases checks of residency are undertaken by mail.¹⁴⁵

6.25.2 Usually the field work associated with a habitation review takes three months to complete. If during a review, information is obtained indicating that an elector no longer resides at his/her enrolled address, DROs issue a 'notice of objection' before determining whether that elector's name should be removed from the roll. The total time taken from the commencement to the completion of a review is normally five months.

6.25.3 During the last two reviews casual staff engaged have been paid a premium or incentive payment, which is currently \$1.05 for each enrolment form completed and collected. This is claimed to be cost effective as it avoids subsequent postage and other office costs.¹⁴⁶

6.25.4 Roll cleansing and updating is not limited to habitation review activities. The AEC and all State Commissions undertake enrolment advertising campaigns prior to elections, by-elections and referendums. These are often supplemented by similar campaigns mounted by local government authorities prior to their periodic elections and by-elections. In addition, some Commissions participate and establish information booths at major shows, shopping centres, career exhibitions and the like.

6.25.5 Electoral events themselves result in large numbers of enrolment claim cards being completed at polling booths by electors who discover that either their name does not appear on the roll or that their recorded address is no longer appropriate. In some instances DROs have experienced significant delays in receiving completed electoral claims from State and local government authorities, following

elections in those jurisdictions. These delays can result in the disenfranchisement of electors at subsequent elections.

6.25.6

Recommendation 51. The Committee recommends that the AEC make arrangements with State/Territory Commissions and State/Territory local government associations to ensure that completed electoral claim cards received by those authorities are delivered expeditiously to State/Territory AEC head offices or DROs.

6.25.7 Continuous enrolment advertising is also arranged through Australia Post. Posters are displayed and claim cards are available in most post offices and postal agencies. One witness suggested that this arrangement be extended through offices of the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service.¹⁴⁷ Enrolment claim cards are also available from most local government authorities.

6.25.8 Returned correspondence addressed to electors assists in maintaining accurate rolls. A substantial volume of returned correspondence occurs in the aftermath of an electoral event when letters are sent to non-voters or after a general mail-out following a redistribution. Members of Parliament at both the Commonwealth and State level, who offer their services to new constituents, frequently receive undelivered mail which is passed on to the AEC for investigation.

¹⁴⁵ Evidence, p. 3177.
¹⁴⁶ Evidence, p. 3233.

¹⁴⁷ Evidence, p. 550.

6.25.9 At the Brisbane public hearing, the Committee was concerned to hear that the Queensland Parliamentary Information Technology Services Group had advised Members in April 1992 that the AEC would not act on any mail returned to State Members.¹⁴⁸ This matter was pursued with the AEO for Queensland who advised that since January 1992, when the joint Commonwealth and Queensland roll arrangements became effective, it has been the AEC's expectation that the Queensland Electoral Commissioner would, in the first instance, interrogate the RMANS database to determine if more recent information is on file. He added that in those cases where no change of details are recorded, these could be referred to his office for further investigation. The AEO for Queensland agreed that the matter should be discussed further at a subsequent meeting of the Joint Roll Management Committee, which has been established under the Queensland agreement.¹⁴⁹

6.26 The Cost of Electoral Roll Reviews (ERRs)

6.26.1 As indicated in AEC annual reports, the cost of electoral roll review activities for the period July 1988 - June 1991 was as follows:

1988-89	\$ 6 716 592
1989-90	\$ 3 237 279
1990-91	\$10 953 185 ¹⁵⁰

6.26.2 These are the additional costs of conducting reviews and do not include salaries and overheads associated with permanent AEC staff involved in organising and managing reviews. The totals are adjusted to take account of the contributions towards the cost of

¹⁴⁸ Evidence, p. 504, Exhibit No. 20.

¹⁴⁹ Evidence, p. 546.

¹⁵⁰ This should be compared with the AEC's notional annualised cost of Electoral Roll Reviews of \$6 900 000, Evidence p. S1019.

reviews which are made by the States. Western Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland each contribute half of the direct costs of reviews in those States.¹⁵¹

6.27 Effectiveness of ERRs

6.27.1 The 1988-89 Annual Report of the AEC indicates that during that year a number of major enrolment stimulation activities were undertaken including a review of the rolls in all States, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. By the end of June 1989 the review produced more than 500 000 additions and amendments to the rolls.¹⁵²

6.27.2 As an indication of the mobility of the elector population, it is noted that a further 594 612 amendments to the rolls occurred in the short period between the announcement of the March 1990 election on 16 February and the close of rolls on 26 February.¹⁵³

6.27.3 In 1990-91 habitation reviews were conducted in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT and as indicated earlier costs incurred in relation to these reviews totalled almost \$11 million.¹⁵⁴

6.27.4 During electoral roll reviews it is found that at approximately 20 per cent of residences visited, eligible persons are either unenrolled or require their enrolment to be transferred. New enrolment forms are collected immediately in more than 65 per cent of these cases.

¹⁵¹ Evidence, p. S414.

¹⁵² AEC Annual Report 1988/89, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Table 3, AEC Annual Report, 1989/90.

¹⁵⁴ AEC Annual Report, 1990/91.

6.27.5 As a result of the review in New South Wales during 1991, 212 661 electors were removed from the roll in that State. This review and its subsequent follow-up generated 500 504 alterations to the roll.¹⁵⁵

6.27.6 Several witnesses expressed doubt about the effectiveness of habitation reviews.¹⁵⁶ The New South Wales Electoral Commissioner indicated that as a result of the ERR prior to the May 1991 election in that State, approximately 240 000 electors were removed from the rolls but 40 000 of them subsequently claimed 'section' votes on the grounds that they had been removed incorrectly.¹⁵⁷ Similar evidence was obtained in respect to the 1992 referendum held in Queensland where 'we allowed thousands of people who had been taken off the roll by an objection process to vote.'¹⁵⁸

6.27.7 Mr Nugent, the Australian Electoral Officer for New South Wales told the Committee that the 40 000 'section votes' were not necessarily removed in error. He considered that many of these electors probably made false declarations of entitlement. He substantiated that view 'because what we find is that when we send out a reinstatement notice, having put them back on the roll, the reinstatement notice comes back to us marked 'return to sender' — they are not there.'¹⁵⁹ Whether such electors should be reinstated is relevant to the accuracy of the roll. The Committee notes that different provisions apply in different jurisdictions. In South Australian elections electors obtaining 'section' votes but who were removed from the roll by objection are not reinstated. This leads to temporary variations in State and Commonwealth electors on the joint roll in that State.

¹⁵⁵ Evidence, p. S233.

¹⁵⁶ Mr L Smith, Western Australia, Evidence, p. 24, Mr A Becker, South Australia, Evidence, p. 152 and Mr I Dickson, New South Wales, Evidence, p 373.

¹⁵⁷ Evidence, p. 373.

¹⁵⁸ Evidence, p. 470.

¹⁵⁹ Evidence, p. 437.

6.27.8 In respect of the 1992 Western Australian daylight saving referendum, which was held in conjunction with a by-election in the State district of Ashburton on 4 April 1992, the Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia advised that as a result of a special habitation review in the Ashburton district, 1 500 enrolments had been processed.¹⁶⁰

6.27.9 The Committee was subsequently advised by the Western Australian Branch of the Australian Labor Party that it had also extensively canvassed the area for enrolments in the period leading up to roll closure and had been responsible for 750 of the 1 500 enrolments mentioned above. While the Committee is unable to assess how many enrolments may have been achieved in the absence of Labor Party activity, it is unable to ignore the following assertions made by the Party:

In February 1992 Ashburton's enrolment was approximately 8400, substantially below the quota for electorates in the Mining and Pastoral Region. It appeared that the predictions of the Boundary Commissioners had been substantially amiss in the case of Ashburton while the other 5 Lower House districts were well within the permitted range.

From our observations and other demographic information it was apparent that there had not been the substantial drop in population which this low enrolment would suggest.

In fact two State MPs enrolled more than a 120 people in that town [Roebourne] in the last week of the enrolment period; many of those electors had never been enrolled but had lived in the town all their lives.

It ought to be of great concern to the AEC that in two weeks the roll increased by some 16%, with a substantial number of those electors

¹⁶⁰ Evidence, p. S408.

from one community within 20 minutes drive of the AECs office.¹⁶¹

6.27.10 In response to this matter the AEC advised that although a habitation review had not been conducted in this area for two years, it had been planned to do so between February and September 1992. Because of the by-election which was called at short notice, efforts were made to cover the area prior to that event. In the short period available, AEC staff visited 5 645 residences and either personally collected, or received by mail, 2 600 enrolment claims. The AEC also speculated that of the 750 enrolment claims obtained by ALP canvassers these may well have included some of those left by review staff for return by mail.¹⁶²

6.27.11 Criticisms of the timing and frequency of habitation reviews are not new. As early as 1974, following the 'Review of the Structure, Systems and Facilities of the Australian Electoral Office', undertaken by WD Scott & Co Pty Ltd, it was observed at paragraph 10.3.2:

From our study we recommend that the concentrated review should be replaced by a continuous Habitation Review, eg. with one or two Review Officers working continuously to complete a Division within each year, instead of typically 6 Review Officers for 3 months.

This would even out the workload in the Divisional Office and achieve the same results. Whilst some sections of the Division may be more up-to-date than others under this method, the present method gets the whole Division up-to-date at a certain period. But an election may not be held for six months after a periodic Habitation Review; thus the present method is not more beneficial to an election than a continuous updating.

6.27.12 In 1985 the AEC undertook an internal 'Review of Divisional Offices'. The report of that review also touched upon the efficiency of concentrated habitation reviews and at paragraph 2.6 the following observations are made:

Divisional staff would prefer an annual allocation for habitation reviews to permit an even distribution of work. They regard habitation reviews as one of the most effective public awareness activities Divisional Offices can undertake, as well as being the primary mechanism, for generating information for maintaining and updating the rolls.

6.27.13 Support for ongoing, rather than sporadic reviews, was shared by the Divisional Returning Officer for McPherson who appeared before the Committee in a private capacity. He told the Committee:

What happens now is that we try to get this photo image of the electorate -clunk- like that and what happens is that we work our butts off going at a particular task furiously and then invariably it takes us months afterwards to process all the information. If we had permanent officers doing a continuous review...then we could structure our work plan in a divisional office and within the Commission as a whole much better.¹⁶³

6.27.14 In the AEC's December 1987 report on its 'Efficiency Scrutiny into Regionalisation', further comment appeared on the subject of habitation reviews at paragraph 10.2:

Habitation reviews should be conducted over a 2 year period, whether or not any change in the AEC's structure results from this Scrutiny. The impact on staff and on the workload would be beneficial in either case and the cost of the review could be spread over 2 years.

¹⁶¹ Evidence, pp. S511-12.
¹⁶² Evidence, p. S890.

¹⁶³ Evidence, p. 558.

There is no major advantage in condensing the activity of a review into only a portion of each 2 year span. For example, the latest review was conducted in the nine months immediately preceding the 1987 Federal Election but there were still over 700,000 roll transactions carried out Australia-wide in the 2 1/2 weeks between the announcement of the election and the close of the roll.

6.27.15 Although the AEC's Efficiency Scrutiny Report was referred to the JSCEM for inquiry, its subsequent report to the 35th Parliament made no comment on the subject of habitation reviews.

6.27.16 At public hearings held in Brisbane the Committee was told that a recent comparison of census data against the number of persons enrolled suggests that there may be at least 100 000 eligible unenrolled persons in Queensland.¹⁶⁴

6.27.17 Another criticism of the present methodology focused on the outcome of concentrated state-wide reviews. Several witnesses indicated that because of elector mobility, the information collected during a review is often out of date by the end of a review.¹⁶⁵

And I do not believe that knocking on a door once every two years is proactive in the sense that it is not producing the results we are looking for. Indeed, by the time you have finished the roll canvass it is probably at least 30 000 or 40 000 entries out of date. It takes three months to do it.¹⁶⁶

6.27.18 The general feeling of disillusionment about the sporadic nature of habitation reviews was shared by Professor Hughes who advised:

...as to the Habitation Review as a means of roll management, I agree it is both expensive and declining in effectiveness. Were it politically possible to vary the frequency of reviews by the socio-economic nature of the area - old and solid suburbs every other year, new suburbs and inner-city every six months, say - the money would be more effectively spent. One of the considerations behind the alignment of Habitation Review walks and Census Collector District boundaries was that Divisional staff ought to be more conscious of the detail of their roll, able to note any unexpected perturbations in relatively small numbers (for no one can have a feel for a bag of 70,000 undifferentiated electors), conscious of age or national origin demographic changes that might affect electoral behaviour.¹⁶⁷

6.27.19 These comments point to a dilemma facing any electoral administration considering a more selective and targeted approach to habitation reviews, as it is understandable that they would wish to be free of any suggestion that selective reviews benefit one side of politics and not the other.

6.27.20 On the subject of the frequency of habitation reviews, it is noted that the New South Wales Parliament now has fixed four year terms. In South Australia, the minimum term is three years with a four year maximum, and in Victoria there is also a minimum term of three years.

6.27.21 The current statutory requirement to conduct a habitation review in each two year period may not always be appropriate for Commonwealth election or redistribution purposes. If, for example, a period of three years transpires between two Commonwealth elections and a habitation review commences nine months before the first of those elections, then another review must commence some eighteen months before the second election. With an elector turnover of more than 20% per annum, this second review would achieve little in terms of roll accuracy for the second election.

¹⁶⁴ Evidence, pp. 480 and 482.

¹⁶⁵ Evidence, pp. 480, 123 and 630.

¹⁶⁶ Evidence, p. 480.

¹⁶⁷ Evidence, p. S430.

6.27.22 The Committee notes that the joint rolls are used by the three tiers of government for the conduct of their elections. The provisions of section 92 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act are far too prescriptive in specifying the timing of habitation reviews for much weight to be given to States' needs for accurate rolls leading up to State electoral events.

6.27.23 The timing of the review should reflect the electoral program of the particular jurisdiction. When costs are charged to the States this should also be a product of the electoral program. For example, in New South Wales where elections are held four yearly, it would be inequitable to seek recovery of half the cost of a review designed to suit a three year electoral cycle.

6.27.24 As the reviews are needed to prepare the roll for Commonwealth and State electoral events, and these events are independent of each other, both the timing and the funding of the review should be linked to its specific purpose rather than to an inflexible formula.

6.27.25

Recommendation 52. The Committee recommends that Section 92 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act be amended to allow more flexibility in the timing of Electoral Roll Reviews.

6.27.26

Recommendation 53. The Committee recommends that where a review is timed to meet Commonwealth needs (for instance an election or a redistribution) the cost be carried by the Commonwealth.

6.27.27

Recommendation 54. The Committee recommends that where a review is timed to meet State/Territory needs (for instance an election or a redistribution) the cost be carried by the State/Territory concerned.

6.27.28

Recommendation 55. The Committee recommends that where a review is timed to meet Commonwealth and State/Territory needs the cost be shared equally between the Commonwealth and the State/Territory concerned.

6.28 Alternatives to ERRs

6.28.1 It was noted that other methods of updating the rolls have been trialled by the AEC. In 1989 a mail-out system was piloted in New South Wales and the ACT. Initial responses to letters to electors was only 40-45 per cent and response to a follow-up letter only 15 per cent. A similar mail-out was undertaken in the Division of

Gwydir in 1989, with an initial response of 35 per cent and a follow-up response of 10-15 per cent.¹⁶⁸

6.28.2 In 1986 an attempt was made in South Australia to obtain details of possible elector movements using information supplied by the electricity authority in that State. This trial was aborted when it was found that account holders are not always in the names of residents and that there were problems with address matching.¹⁶⁹

6.28.3 In an endeavour to encourage and capture elector movements, the New South Wales Electoral Commissioner advised that his office distributes enrolment material through rental bond boards, the Roads and Traffic Authority and local courts.¹⁷⁰ The South Australian Electoral Commissioner indicated that for the last five to six years his office has been providing enrolment material to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal (bond board) in that State. He added that in Tasmania, the State Electoral Office accesses data held by the Valuer-General.¹⁷¹

6.28.4 During a conference of senior Australian electoral officials held in Melbourne in October 1990, the AEC advised State Commissions that the Government considered that the States should be making a greater contribution towards the maintenance of the joint rolls.

6.28.5 In November 1990, acting on behalf of all States, the Victorian Electoral Commissioner wrote to the Australian Electoral Commissioner seeking answers to a series of questions on matters of roll maintenance and roll management. One question specifically

asked whether the AEC was actively considering 'possible alternatives to habitation reviews.'¹⁷²

6.28.6 The reply to that question indicated that although alternatives were being considered, 'early departure from the present habitation review process should not be anticipated'. However, it was also indicated that when RMANS progressed to an address based system it would be possible to undertake 'mail reviews of various kinds' and that other options included the use of other databases and closer links with Australia Post.¹⁷³

6.28.7 The next annual conference of senior Australian electoral officials was held at Hobart in September 1991. That conference spread over two days, the first comprising a meeting of State officials, the second involving both State and Commonwealth officials. The Victorian Electoral Commissioner raised as an agenda item the possibility of a joint pilot project in one State to evaluate alternative methods of cleansing and updating rolls, taking into account the use of alternative sources of data and privacy considerations.¹⁷⁴

6.28.8 In evidence, the South Australian Electoral Commissioner advised that at the meeting held on the first day of the conference it was decided that the Tasmanian Electoral Commissioner would head a small committee of State Commissioners – from Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia – to investigate the types of data stored by other agencies which may be of assistance in determining elector movements.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ Evidence, p. S830.

¹⁶⁹ Evidence, p. S744.

¹⁷⁰ Evidence, p. 384.

¹⁷¹ Evidence, p. 622.

¹⁷² Evidence, p. S547.

¹⁷³ Evidence, p. S554.

¹⁷⁴ Evidence, p. S674.

¹⁷⁵ Evidence, p. 622.

6.28.9 It is noted that about one week later, the AEC wrote to the State Commissions offering to lead the project and to coordinate input from the various States.¹⁷⁶

6.28.10 The Committee sees no advantage in pursuing the reasons for this misunderstanding about which administration was to coordinate the study, but notes that the AEC, as recently as April 1992, wrote to State Commissioners with a view to determining if a better approach could be found to raise the profile of this important matter. Evidence indicates that this recent approach has been favourably received.¹⁷⁷

6.28.11 Contrary to the impression given that the State Commissions have lost interest in this study, it is noted that there has been continuing correspondence since May 1991 on this subject between the Western Australian Electoral Commissioner and the Minister responsible for electoral matters in that State. It is also noted that in a letter addressed by the Western Australian Minister to the Commonwealth Minister for Administrative Services in February 1992, attention was drawn to the need to respect privacy principles when considering access to databases of non electoral agencies.

6.28.12 In recognition of the fact that state-based utilities and agencies hold publicly available data which could be useful in roll maintenance activities, the South Australian Electoral Commissioner is conducting a pilot study to determine if the elector address database can be linked with land-based information systems in that State.¹⁷⁸

6.28.13 A similar exercise is being piloted in Victoria, where the State Electoral Office has been selected by the Victorian Government

to participate in an exercise designed to link elector addresses to geographic information systems.¹⁷⁹

6.28.14 Privacy issues were raised in two other submissions. On the one hand the Lismore Greens expressed the view that information collected for electoral purposes should not be available to other bodies or organisations.¹⁸⁰

6.28.15 On the other hand, Mr Ball posed the question of whether privacy is more important than the franchise.¹⁸¹ Clearly these are matters which must be fully considered in any attempt to devise alternatives to habitation reviews.

6.28.16 It is understood that the purposes of these pilot studies are two-fold. Firstly to facilitate State redistribution processes and secondly to enable comparisons to be made with other publicly available information sources which can be linked through geographic databases. However, even if these links can be successfully achieved, this in itself would not enable additions, deletions and amendments to be made to the rolls. It would then be necessary to place in train a mechanism for obtaining claim cards from the persons identified in the matching process.

6.28.17 Information was received during the inquiry that the AEC plans to convert its present segmented approach to addresses, to a system whereby every address is individually identified. This should pin-point vacant houses and those with multiple family occupancy, which should assist in the review process.

¹⁷⁶ Evidence, p. S675.

¹⁷⁷ Evidence, p. S716.

¹⁷⁸ Evidence, p. 622.

¹⁷⁹ Evidence, p. 254.

¹⁸⁰ Evidence, p. S252.

¹⁸¹ Evidence, p. S403.

6.28.18 The profound importance of having accurate and up-to-date electoral rolls was forcefully expressed in a submission from the Liberal Party of Australia which commented:

The greatest concern the Liberal Party has regarding the administration of elections in Australia is the maintenance and integrity of the Commonwealth, State, Territory and local government electoral rolls.

It is essential that the highest standards are maintained to ensure the integrity of electoral rolls. Accurate electoral rolls are necessary to safeguard public confidence in the democratic process and importantly, given the recent trend for State and Federal elections to be determined by close margins in a small number of seats, they are essential for ensuring that the democratic wishes of the voters are not corrupted.¹⁸²

6.28.19 During the course of the inquiry the AEC conducted a corporate planning workshop. This was convened in March 1992 and involved a wide cross section of the Commission's clients including political commentators, Members of the Australian Parliament, political parties, local government and community councils. At that conference one of the recurring issues was that of roll management, where concern was expressed about the integrity and accuracy of the rolls. There appears to be a general consensus that the habitation review process has to be improved.

6.28.20

Recommendation 56. The Committee recommends that consideration of alternatives to habitation reviews be undertaken by the proposed Australian Joint Roll Council (AJRC).

¹⁸² Evidence, p. S333.

6.29 Joint Roll Allowances

6.29.1 In considering the cost of maintaining rolls, the Committee noted that joint rolls allowances are paid to AEC divisional staff. Divisional clerks appointed after 15 May 1978 are not entitled to joint roll allowances.¹⁸³

6.29.2 These allowances are \$1 001 and \$180 respectively and in total represent an annual outgoing cost of approximately \$150 000 (1.5 cents per elector per annum).

6.29.3 Joint roll allowances were introduced in 1928 at which time Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania were the only States with Joint Roll Agreements with the Commonwealth. The determination which authorised the payment of these allowances to DROs and clerks acknowledged that in Victoria and South Australia DROs were required to perform extra duties outside normal hours, in maintaining separate State rolls. (Overtime was not paid to DROs or clerks in 1928.) In the absence of full time DROs in Tasmania, it was considered appropriate that the clerks in that State receive a joint roll allowance, not to compensate for the loss of private time, but for the extra strain of having to occasionally work at specially high pressure for some weeks. The same rationale was used to justify allowances for the Clerks in Victoria and South Australia.

6.29.4 The 1928 determination stated in part:

The claim was based on the allowance paid for the [Legislative] Council work in South Australia. That was calculated on a basis of 1.5 to 2 hours overtime per week continuously. It is not claimed that the overtime work in connection with the Assembly Rolls is so great as this in total, and any amount to be fixed must be to a large extent arbitrary.

¹⁸³ Evidence, p. S589.

6.29.5 As time progressed joint roll allowances were extended to other States and by 1967 two separate allowances were being paid. The first allowance was payable for State Lower House roll maintenance in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania and the second allowance for Upper House roll maintenance in Victoria and South Australia.

6.29.6 In 1975 the Commonwealth Public Service Board considered that there might be a better way of recompensing staff for any extra duties associated with the work in maintaining separate State rolls. In a subsequent review in 1978 the decision was taken to replace the existing DRO allowances by an allowance which equalled one increment in a DRO's salary range, on the basis that joint rolls work involved the exercise of significant skill and responsibility. The decision was also taken at that time not to pay the allowance to any new divisional clerks who would be permitted to work overtime if necessary. Although the existing clerks continued to receive the allowance, this was to be offset against overtime.

6.29.7 In 1984 DROs were reclassified from Clerk Class 6 to Clerk Class 7 on the basis of increased work value, including the impact of the 1983 amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act and their enhanced electoral education duties. Allowances already being paid were excluded from consideration during this review.¹⁸⁴

6.29.8 With the introduction of a new classification structure in 1987, which included broadbanding, DROs effectively received another reclassification to the Clerk Class 8 range at that time.

6.29.9 As indicated earlier in this chapter, computerisation of the national roll was achieved firstly in the mid 1970s on the AEC's COM system which was superseded by RMANS in the mid 1980s.

6.29.10 Computerisation resulted in divisional staff having to maintain a single address file suitably encoded to enable Commonwealth, State (and in some States, local government) rolls to be produced. That single address file is currently encoded to an even lower level of CCDs (Census Collection Districts), part CCDs and habitation walks (for electoral roll review purposes). No longer do DROs and their staff need to maintain separate cards or registers for Commonwealth and State purposes.

6.29.11

Recommendation 57. The Committee recommends that a review of joint roll allowances be undertaken by the proposed Australian Joint Roll Council in consultation with the relevant union.

6.30 Parallel Rolls

6.30.1 An important question relates to the desirability of maintaining parallel rolls as is done for local government in Victoria, for State and local government in Western Australia and for the Legislative Council in Tasmania. Until this year the roll for the Legislative Council could best be regarded as a separate roll, but the recent introduction of a joint enrolment card with the Commonwealth means that, for all intents and purposes, it has become a parallel roll similar to those in the other two States.

6.30.2 The term 'parallel rolls' does not imply that State Commissions duplicate the function of collecting data on electors' names and addresses. In all States it is the AEC which collects and maintains the Australia-wide elector database. It is the processing of

¹⁸⁴ Evidence, p. S986.

that elector database which leads to the usage of the term 'parallel rolls'.

6.30.3 Historically a major reason for establishing parallel rolls in the mainland States was the AEC's inability to produce rolls for local government. The Committee is aware that the AEC currently provides electoral rolls for local government in New South Wales. It is reasonable to assume that the capacity to provide this service in all States now exists within the AEC.

6.30.4 The attitude of the AEC to State parallel rolls appears to be that they can do as they please provided they pay half the cost of the joint roll:

People want their parallel rolls because they think that they can actually do all these things. I have no objection to that. If a State wants to have a parallel roll I do not care as long as it pays us the amount of money, which is 50 per cent of the direct cost for actually collecting information, massaging that information and preparing a database which is available for everybody.¹⁸⁵

6.30.5 The major disadvantage of the parallel rolls is that, whatever checks are made, over time they diverge.¹⁸⁶ In Western Australia this problem has been commented on by the Auditor-General and has been analysed in the Nash report (para 6.15.7).

6.30.6 It appears that whilst it is true that the existence of parallel rolls increases the likelihood of divergence, it should be noted that on some occasions the errors have been caused by the AEC, not as a result of manipulation of the data by the State authorities.

¹⁸⁵ Dr D Muffet, Evidence, pp. 284-85.

¹⁸⁶ Evidence, p. S197. Electoral and Administrative Review Commission Report on Queensland Electoral Roll Review, October 1990, p. 35.

6.30.7 During the mid 1980s the local government franchise in Victoria was broadened from property based entitlements to also include electors entitled to vote at Legislative Assembly elections. As the AEC was unable to provide lists of electors in local government areas and wards and ridings when this legislation became operative, the Victorian State Electoral Office had no option but to develop a separate computer system to process the raw data held by the AEC.¹⁸⁷ Since this system was developed, elector data (names, addresses etc) stored by the AEC's RMANS system is regularly transferred on tape for local government purposes. This requires staff of the State Electoral Office to maintain a list of streets and localities encoded to reflect local government boundary information.

6.30.8 In Western Australia, a parallel state based system was developed¹⁸⁸ and the Electoral Commission in that State processes elector data supplied by the AEC to produce both State and local government rolls. Again, this requires the Western Australian Electoral Commission to continuously maintain an encoded list of habitations against which elector data can be matched and sorted.

6.30.9 The Western Australian Electoral Commission has put the argument that, as the States have the need for the greatest level of detail (that is wards and ridings), the rolls should be kept by them.¹⁸⁹ Against this needs to be set the fact that the AEC already codes electors by CCDs for its own purposes and that the additional work for the AEC to code by ward and riding is not great.¹⁹⁰

In previous evidence today, mention was made of the coding requirements of local government and the fact that there is in the order of 570 wards in the State. From memory, I believe that we have somewhere in the order of 3,250 census collection districts. So

¹⁸⁷ Evidence, pp. 253-54.

¹⁸⁸ Evidence, p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Mr L Smith, Western Australian Electoral Commissioner, Evidence, pp. 4-5, 21-22.

¹⁹⁰ Mr B Young, Evidence, p. 80.

It is simply not true to say that the coding for wards is more intricate than it is for census collection districts.¹⁹¹

6.30.10 Given the far greater number of staff that the AEC can commit to the task and the links that many Divisional Returning Officers have with local government, it would seem to be a considerable waste of resources if these staff were not to be used to code electors for the purposes of local government elections.

6.30.11 The AEC seems confident that it can now fulfill the requirements of State and local governments by providing accurate rolls. This view is shared by some States and observers:

The New South Wales experience is that all this information has been provided very simply and very easily. Right now the RMANS system could be putting local government boundaries on every roll in Australia at no extra cost, but there has been no attempt to ask for it.¹⁹²

*My view is that, if you stacked up all the numbers for the cost of maintaining electoral rolls for the Commonwealth and for all the States who are doing it independently, the amount of money spent would be horrendous...There are definitely substantial savings to be made, from a purely rational point of view, in a national roll maintenance system.*¹⁹³

Wearing my hat as Electoral Commissioner after [the 1989 inquiry into New South Wales State elections] and as a result of a consultancy examination also, I fail to see any financial benefit in maintaining my own roll or trying to duplicate it. I envisage that it would be fraught with certain dangers. Particularly if you were trying to process the enrolment cards, it would have the dangers of roll numbers in the States being out of kilter by various methods.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Mr B Young, Evidence, p. 56.

¹⁹² Mr D Farrell, Evidence, p. 229.

¹⁹³ Mr C Phillips, Chief Electoral Officer for the Northern Territory, Evidence, p. 166.

¹⁹⁴ Mr I Dickson, Evidence, p. 360.

6.30.12 In Victoria, the separate computer system operated by the State Electoral Office, in addition to satisfying local government needs also provides other products for State purposes. These include jury lists and lists for Members of Parliament.

6.30.13 In Western Australia, in addition to producing State and local government rolls, the State system produces jury lists, elector details for MPs and random samples for medical research.

6.30.14 In Queensland, even though the AEC supplies rolls for the three levels of government, there is a separate system for jury lists, health research and MPs. There is also a register of Justices of the Peace.

6.30.15 Although it appears that the AEC can meet all State and local government requirements for rolls, there is some doubt as to whether it can or should extend its charter to include all products required by the States. In responding to requests for other products the AEC has indicated that requests such as these have to be allocated expensive and limited resources within the AEC against a background of many and conflicting priorities.¹⁹⁵

6.30.16 The final decision as to whether the States continue to operate separate systems is a matter for the State government concerned. However, the Committee notes that the AEC's divisional network has the capacity to encode to local government level at little if any additional cost. Assuming that the AEC is indeed able to provide this service to the satisfaction of the States, it seems there would be significant cost savings if they utilised the AEC's facilities in place of their existing parallel rolls. Local government satisfaction with AEC services has already been noted.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Evidence, p. S834.

¹⁹⁶ See para 4.4.1.

Recommendation 58. The Committee recommends that the AJRC give early consideration to the use of AEC facilities for the production of all electoral rolls for State/Territory and local government election requirements throughout Australia, and that it advise the States/Territories of the results of its investigation.

6.31 South Australian System

6.31.1 South Australia is currently in a unique position in that it has a separate computerised enrolment system (EAGLE) which is not interconnected with RMANS. This means that interstate transfers must be handled manually. There is evidence that the manual procedures are not efficient if only for the reason that the automation of the rest of the country means that the special needs of South Australia are easily overlooked.¹⁹⁷ Moreover the matching techniques used by RMANS for other interstate transfers are not available in the manual system.

6.31.2 The Electoral Commissioner for South Australia has argued that the failure of the South Australian system to pick up many interstate transfers does not matter greatly because it is unlikely that an elector would attempt to vote interstate.¹⁹⁸ The Committee is not convinced. Its view is that every effort should be made and every technique applied to make the roll as clean as possible. Even if electors are unlikely to travel interstate to vote, impersonation is always possible. Even if only a small number of interstate electors are

¹⁹⁷ Evidence, p. S197.

¹⁹⁸ Evidence, pp. 621, 630-31.

not removed from the roll, it could change the result in a close election such as Hawker at the 1990 Commonwealth elections which was decided with a majority of fourteen votes.

6.31.3 For some time South Australia has been pressing for an automated link with RMANS so that interstate transfers can be adequately checked and matched.¹⁹⁹ Mr David Farrell, who has knowledge of the matter from his previous position in the AEC, noted:

... it would be feasible because there were communication lines that would allow a window from one terminal into either system both ways. This is not linking the two systems but simply providing an inquiry both ways. I think that is still feasible and could be done if there were sufficient resources to do it. I am not persuaded of the idea of linking the two systems to be interactive; I think that is a somewhat tougher nut.²⁰⁰

6.31.4 The AEC has agreed that a link between RMANS and EAGLE would be feasible, but:

It is, however, a matter at this stage of money and priority. We certainly did not see it in the short term as being a link that we exchange data but, as David [Farrell] said, it is an inquiry facility for both systems.²⁰¹

6.31.5 The Committee considers there is value in providing a checking mechanism for interstate transfers.

¹⁹⁹ Evidence, p. 686.

²⁰⁰ Evidence, p. 686.

²⁰¹ Mr P Dacey, Evidence, p. 686.

Recommendation 59. The Committee recommends that the AEC approach the South Australian Electoral Commissioner with a view to interlinking RMANS and EAGLE so that interstate transfers can be adequately checked, matched and effected.

6.31.7 In the longer term it is understandable that there would be a view in the AEC that RMANS should replace EAGLE in South Australia. It is equally understandable that the Electoral Commissioner for South Australia wishes to retain the local system which predates RMANS and has provided a satisfactory service for many years.

6.31.8 The future of the separate enrolment system in South Australia is a matter to be negotiated by the AEC and the State Electoral Department. The Committee's recommendation that the AJRC inquire into the relative merits of centralised and decentralised systems, if acted upon, should contribute to negotiations on the future of EAGLE.

6.32 Conclusion

6.32.1 The fact that the chapters on the electoral rolls have taken up nearly half the report reflects the importance this topic has assumed in the inquiry. Roll maintenance became a focus for issues which have arisen between the State Electoral Commissions and the AEC over many years. What appeared on the surface to require a review of policy in fact demanded investigation of major questions of personnel management, intergovernmental relations and detailed

technical information. The Committee hopes the inquiry has provided a proper forum for these issues, and that the resulting report will contribute to workable solutions.

Mr Arch Bevis, MP

Chairman

September 1992

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

Submission Number	Person/Organisation		
1	Submission from Mr C Wydeman, New South Wales State Office, Australian Electoral Commission dated 27 September 1991	12	Submission from G Edgley dated 21 October 1991
2	Letter from Mr Peter Blackmore MP, Member for Maitland dated 1 October 1991	13	Letter from Mr E Booker dated 22 October 1991
3	Letter from Mr K Chalkley JP undated	14	Submission from Mrs E Gladwin and Mr S O'Brien dated 24 October 1991
4	Letter from Mr P Corcoran dated 9 October 1991	15	Submission from Mr Garry Nehl MP, Member for Cowper dated 25 October 1991
5	Letter from The Hon Bob Brown MP, Minister for Land Transport dated 14 October 1991	16	Submission from Mr L Laragy, Acting Divisional Returning Officer for Melbourne Ports, Australian Electoral Commission dated 25 October 1991
6	Letter from Mr Stan Neilly MP, Member for Cessnock dated 14 October 1991	17	Submission from Mr A Forbes, Divisional Returning Officer for Macarthur, Australian Electoral Commission dated 14 October 1991
7	Submission from Mr S McGrath, Young Shire Council dated 15 October 1991	18	Letter from Ms G Behrens undated
8	Submission from Mr K Smith, Divisional Returning Officer for New England, Australian Electoral Commission dated 14 October 1991	19	Submission from Mr J Nixon, Tweed Shire Council dated 25 October 1991
9	Submission from Mr B Blackmore, Divisional Returning Officer for Bruce, Australian Electoral Commission dated 17 October 1991	20	Submission from Mr B Young, Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia, Australian Electoral Commission dated 29 October 1991
10	Letter from Mr J Bartlett, Divisional Returning Officer for Riverina-Darling, Australian Electoral Commission dated 17 October 1991	21	Letter from Mr H Bopp dated 23 October 1991
		22	Submission from Mr I Jones JP dated 8 November 1991
		23	Supplementary submission from Mr I Jones JP dated 12 November 1991

24	Submission from Mr R Swords, City Manager, The Parramatta City Council dated 8 November 1991	34	Submission from Mr R Williams, Divisional Returning Officer for Brisbane, Australian Electoral Commission dated 19 November 1991
25	Submission from Mr I Dickson, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office New South Wales dated 5 December 1991	35	Submission from Mr P Robson, National Secretary, Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union dated 22 November 1991
26	Letter from Mr G Paddick, Liberal Party of Western Australia dated 7 November 1991	36	Submission from Mr P Downes, Divisional Returning Officer for Bendigo, Australian Electoral Commission dated 21 November 1991
27	Submission from Mr W Eaton, Deputy Australian Electoral Officer for South Australia, Australian Electoral Commission dated 6 November 1991	37	Submission from Mr T Owen dated 21 November 1991
28	Submission from Mr B Cullen, Divisional Returning Officer for Wannon, Australian Electoral Commission dated 18 November 1991	38	Submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 22 November 1991
29	Submission from Mr N Pember, Australian Electoral Commission Staff Association of Western Australia dated 15 November 1991	39	Submission from Ms J Wallace and Mr A Oshlack, The Lismore Greens dated 22 November 1991
30	Submission from Mr D Crabb, The Electoral Reform Society of South Australia dated 19 November 1991	40	Submission from Dr Geoff Gallop, MLA Minister for Parliamentary and Electoral Reform, Government of Western Australia dated 27 November 1991
31	Submission from Mr D Delmo, Divisional Returning Officer for Kooyong, Australian Electoral Commission dated 15 November 1991	41	Submission from Mr A Becker, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Department South Australia dated 27 November 1991
32	Submission from Mr R Patching, Divisional Returning Officer for Rankin and Mr A Hewson, Divisional Returning Officer for Hume, Australian Electoral Commission dated 21 November 1991	42	Submission from Hon Marshall Perron, MLA Chief Minister for the Northern Territory dated 28 November 1991
33	Submission from Mr M Lamerton, Divisional Returning Officer for McPherson, Australian Electoral Commission dated 22 October 1991	43	Submission from the Liberal Party of Australia, Federal Secretariat dated December 1991
		44	Submission from Mr Hendy Cowan, MLA Leader of the National Party of Australia (WA) Inc dated 11 November 1991

45	Submission from Hon Michael Field, MHA Premier of Tasmania undated	56	Supplementary submission from Mrs E Gladwin and Mr S O'Brien dated 23 March 1992
46	Submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated December 1991	57	Submission from Mr R Longland, Australian Electoral Officer for Queensland, Australian Electoral Commission dated 22 April 1992
47	Submission from Mr K Crooke, State Director, National Party of Australia - Queensland dated 18 February 1992	58	Submission from Professor C Hughes dated 24 April 1992
48	Supplementary submission from Mr I Jones JP, dated 28 February 1992	59	Submission from Mr D O'Shea, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Queensland dated 1 April 1992
49	Submission from Mr N Tall, Australian Electoral Officer for Tasmania, Australian Electoral Commission dated 28 February 1992	60	Letter from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 13 April 1992
50	Submission from Mr R Krause, Acting Shire Clerk, Caboolture Shire Council dated 21 February 1992	61	Letter from Mr I Dickson, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office New South Wales dated 7 April 1992
51	Submission from Dr D Muffet, Australian Electoral Officer for Victoria, Australian Electoral Commission undated	62	Letter from Mr I Dickson, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office New South Wales dated 16 April 1992
52	Submission from Mr C Ball dated 2 March 1992	63	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 1 May 1992
53	Supplementary submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 10 March 1992	64	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 7 May 1992
54	Supplementary submission from Mr B Young, Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia, Australian Electoral Commission dated 19 March 1992	65	Supplementary submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 7 May 1992
55	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 20 March 1992	66	Submission from the NSW Institute of Returning Officers dated 17 November 1991

67	Submission from Mr L Smith, Electoral Commissioner, Western Australian Electoral Commission dated 12 May 1992	78	Supplementary submission from Mr A Becker, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Department South Australia dated 21 May 1992
68	Supplementary submission from the Caboolture Shire Council dated 15 May 1992	79	Supplementary submission from Mr R Longland, Australian Electoral Officer for Queensland, Australian Electoral Commission dated 25 May 1992
69	Supplementary submission from Mr R Williams, Divisional Returning Officer for Brisbane, Australian Electoral Commission dated 15 May 1992	80	Submission from Mr G Trinder, Consultant to Western Australian Electoral Commission dated 25 May 1992
70	Supplementary submission from Mr M Lamerton, Divisional Returning Officer for McPherson, Australian Electoral Commission dated 14 May 1992	81	Supplementary submission from Mr G Trinder, Consultant to Western Australian Electoral Commission dated 25 May 1992
71	Submission from the Hon Wayne Goss, MLA Premier of Queensland dated 12 May 1992	82	Supplementary submission from Mr L Smith, Electoral Commissioner, Western Australian Electoral Commission dated 28 May 1992
72	Submission from Mr J Wasson, Acting Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office New South Wales dated 15 May 1992	83	Supplementary submission from Mr L Smith, Electoral Commissioner, Western Australian Electoral Commission dated 26 May 1992
73	Submission from Mr C Evans, State Secretary, Australian Labor Party, Western Australian Branch dated 12 May 1992	84	Supplementary submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 28 May 1992
74	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 19 May 1992	85	Supplementary submission from Mr B Young, Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia, Australian Electoral Commission dated 26 May 1992
75	Supplementary submission from Mr J Wasson, Acting Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office New South Wales dated 19 May 1992	86	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 29 May 1992
76	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 19 May 1992	87	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 29 May 1992
77	Supplementary submission from Mr L Smith, Electoral Commissioner, Western Australian Electoral Commission dated 23 April 1992		

88	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 29 May 1992	100	Supplementary submission from Mr J Wasson, Acting Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office New South Wales undated
89	Supplementary submission from Mr C Wydeman dated 27 May 1992	101	Supplementary submission from Mr A Becker, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Department South Australia undated
90	Submission from Mr D Farrell, Chief Electoral Officer for the State of Tasmania dated 16 June 1992	102	Supplementary submission from Mr D O'Shea, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Queensland dated 13 March 1992
91	Supplementary submission from Mr A Becker, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Department South Australia dated 2 June 1992	103	Submission from Mr C Phillips, Chief Electoral Officer, Northern Territory Electoral Office dated 17 February 1992
92	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 3 June 1992	104	Supplementary submission from Mr L Smith, Electoral Commissioner, Western Australian Electoral Commission dated 23 April 1992
93	Supplementary submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 10 June 1992	105	Supplementary submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 21 May 1992
94	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 12 June 1992		
95	Supplementary submission from Mr D Farrell dated 19 June 1992		
96	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 23 June 1992		
97	Supplementary submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 24 June 1992		
98	Supplementary submission from the Australian Electoral Commission dated 1 July 1992		
99	Supplementary submission from Dr G Lyons, Electoral Commissioner, State Electoral Office Victoria dated 30 March 1992		

APPENDIX 2
LIST OF EXHIBITS

<u>Exhibit Number</u>		
1	Report by Garry Trinder for the State Electoral Office Victoria on Cost Sharing and Joint Roll Arrangements with the Australian Electoral Commission	Background information on Mr Tim Norton: Information Technology and Management Background
	Provided by Dr G Lyons Electoral Commissioner for Victoria	Provided by Dr G Lyons Electoral Commissioner for Victoria
2	Report by Garry Trinder for the Western Australian Electoral Commission: Joint Electoral Roll Processing Strategy Paper	Letter and maps to Dr G Lyons from Mr Tim Norton: Comments on RMANS
	Provided by Dr G Gallop, MLA Government of Western Australia	Provided by Dr G Lyons Electoral Commissioner for Victoria
3	Resume of Mr Garry Trinder	Communications Discussion Paper for the AEC prepared by Housely Communications
	Provided by Mr G Trinder EXECOM Pty Ltd	Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission
4	Report by Garry Trinder for the South Australian Electoral Department: Electoral Roll Processing Strategic Options	Computer Services – Post Election Status Report prepared by Mr Michael Maley
	Provided by Mr A Becker Electoral Commissioner for South Australia	Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission
5	Excerpt from the Western Australian Electoral Commission Annual Report for year ended 30 June 1991: 'Examination of Joint Commonwealth/State Roll Agreement'	AEC Corporate Information Technology Plan, June 1988
	Provided by Mr L Smith Electoral Commissioner for Western Australia	AEC Strategic Plan, 1985 prepared by Computer Sciences of Australia Ltd (summary only included in volume)
		Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission
		Australian Electoral Office Report on ADP Strategy, January 1984 prepared by Price Waterhouse (summary only included in volume)
		Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission
		AEC Roll Management System – Development History
		Provided by Dr D Muffet Australian Electoral Officer for Victoria
		Letter to Dr G Lyons from Dr D Muffet
		Provided by Dr G Lyons Electoral Commissioner for Victoria

15	Structure of Australian Electoral Roll Authority Provided by Dr G Lyons Electoral Commissioner for Victoria	25	Diagram of Client Services administration Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission
16	Letter to Mr Ian Spencer from Mr A Becker Provided by Mr I Spencer Australian Electoral Officer for South Australia	26	Annual computer costs of South Australia Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission
17	Letter to Mr A Becker from Mr I Spencer Provided by Mr A Becker Electoral Commissioner for South Australia		
18	Diagram of the operation of RMANS with State systems Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission		
19	Extract from the Judgment in The Entrance case in the NSW Court of Disputed Returns Provided by Mr B Nugent Australian Electoral Officer for NSW		
20	Excerpt from Parliamentary Information Technology Services Newsletter 14 April 1992 – Electeys Provided by Mr David Russell, QC		
21	Corporate Plan Review 1993-96 – McPherson Work Plan Provided by Mr Mark Lamerton		
22	NSW Electoral Roll for the State Electoral District of Davidson Provided by Mr John Wasson Acting Electoral Commissioner for NSW		
23	Letter to Dr Lyons from Dr Bell Provided by the Australian Electoral Commission		
24	Letter to Mr C Phillips from the Department of Law Northern Territory Provided by Mr C Phillips Chief Electoral Officer for the NT		

APPENDIX 3

a. PUBLIC HEARINGS

PERTH

17 February 1992

ADELAIDE

18 February 1992

HOBART

9 March 1992

MELBOURNE

10 March 1992

CANBERRA

23 March 1992

SYDNEY

14 May 1992

BRISBANE

15 May 1992

CANBERRA

29 May 1992

APPENDIX 3

b. WITNESSES

PERTH 17 FEBRUARY 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr John Larnder Brown, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Pearce
Mr Neil Clifford Pember, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Swan
Mr Patrick Smyth, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Moore
Mr Barry George Young, Australian Electoral Officer for Western Australia

Liberal Party of Western Australia:

Mr James George Clarko, Opposition Spokesman on Racing, Gaming, Planning, and Parliamentary and Electoral Reform
The Honourable Robert Ian Viner, President
Mr Peter Henry Wells, Director of Technology and Communications

Western Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Leslie Ernest Smith, Electoral Commissioner
Mr Charles Harry Welker, Former Deputy Electoral Commissioner
Mr Gary Trinder, Consultant

National Party of Western Australia:

Mr Hendy John Cowan, Leader

ADELAIDE 18 FEBRUARY 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Ian Thomas Spencer, Australian Electoral Officer for South Australia

Northern Territory Electoral Office:

Mr Charles Thomas Phillips, Chief Electoral Officer

State Electoral Department South Australia:

Mr Andrew Kingsley Becker, Electoral Commissioner

Private Citizen:

Mr William Frederick Eaton, South Australia

HOBART 9 MARCH 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Nicholas Digby Tait, Australian Electoral Officer for Tasmania

Tasmanian Electoral Office:

Mr David John Farrell, Chief Electoral Officer

Private Citizen:

Mr Colin Gordon Ball, Tasmania

MELBOURNE 10 MARCH 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Barry Raymond Blackmore, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Bruce

Dr David Muffett, Australian Electoral Officer for Victoria

State Electoral Office Victoria:

Mr Colin Anthony Barry, Deputy Electoral Commissioner

Dr Gregory Philip Lyons, Electoral Commissioner

Mr Timothy Gerard Norton, Consultant

Private Citizen:

Mr Leon Laragy, Victoria

CANBERRA 23 MARCH 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Brian Field Cox, Australian Electoral Commissioner

Mr Paul Dacey, Assistant Commissioner, Development and Research

Mr Michael Charles Maley, Director of Research, Legislative Projects and Freedom of Information

Dr David Muffett, Australian Electoral Officer for Victoria

State Electoral Office New South Wales:

Mr Edward Ian Dickson, Electoral Commissioner

Private Citizens:

Mrs Elizabeth Anne Gladwin, New South Wales
Mr Shawn Barry Redmond O'Brien, Australian Capital Territory

SYDNEY 14 MAY 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Alan Cameron Forbes, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Macarthur
Mr Brian Richard Nugent, Australian Electoral Officer for New South Wales
Mr Robert Worthington, Officer in Charge, Bulli Polling Place
Mr Carlyle Bertram Wydeman, Director of Operations

Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union:

Mr David Avery, Workplace Delegate
Mr Peter Herrmann, National Delegate
Ms Sally O'Loughlin, Assistant National Secretary

New South Wales Institute of Returning Officers:

Mr Keith Eric Bastian, President
Mr Peter Larkin, Honorary Secretary-Treasurer

Parramatta City Council:

Mr Ian Gerard Roberts, Acting Chief Clerk

BRISBANE 15 MAY 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Robert Lance Longland, Australian Electoral Officer for Queensland

Caboolture Shire Council:

Mr Ronald William Krause, Deputy Shire Clerk
Mr John Thomas McLoughlin, Councillor

National Party of Australia:

Mr David Graham Russell QC, Senior Vice-President

Private Citizens:

Professor Colin Anfield Hughes, Queensland
Mr Mark Howard Lamerton, Queensland
Mr Richard James Williams, Queensland

CANBERRA 29 MAY 1992

Australian Electoral Commission:

Dr Robin Alexander Ian Bell, Acting Australia Electoral Commissioner
Mr Peter Birse, Consultant
Mr Paul Edwin Dacey, Assistant Commissioner, Development and Research
Mr David John Molnar, Consultant
Dr David Muffett, Acting Deputy Commissioner
Mr Brian Richard Nugent, Australian Electoral Officer for New South Wales
Mr Timothy Pickering, Acting Director, Enrolment
Mr Warrick Gordon Poyer, Information Technology Officer
Mr Thomas Ross, Area Manager
Mr Alan Wall, Director, Internal Audit
Mr Trevor Willson, Assistant Commissioner, Information and Education

Northern Territory Electoral Office:

Mr Charles Thomas Phillips, Chief Electoral Officer

State Electoral Office New South Wales:

Mrs Monica Frances Floyd, Executive Assistant
Mr John Charles Wasson, Acting Electoral Commissioner

State Electoral Department South Australia:

Mr Andrew Kingsley Becker, Electoral Commissioner

State Electoral Office Victoria:

Mr Colin Anthony Barry, Deputy Electoral Commissioner
Dr Gregory Philip Lyons, Electoral Commissioner

Western Australian Electoral Commission:

Mr Leslie Ernest Smith, Electoral Commissioner
Mr Garry Alexander Trinder, Consultant

Private Citizen:

Mr David Farrell, Tasmania

APPENDIX 4

Election Date Jurisdiction	3/4/82 VIC \$'000	15/5/82 TAS \$'000	*6/11/82 SA \$'000	19/2/83 WA \$'000	22/10/83 QLD \$'000	3/12/83 NT \$'000	24/3/84 NSW \$'000	*1/12/84 FEDERAL \$'000	2/3/85 VIC \$'000	7/1/85 SA \$'000	8/2/85 TAS \$'000	8/2/85 WA \$'000	11/1/86 QLD \$'000	7/3/87 NT \$'000	11/7/87 FEDERAL \$'000	19/3/88 NSW \$'000	1/1/88 VIC \$'000	4/2/89 WA \$'000	1/ \$'	25/11/89 SA \$'000	2/12/89 QLD \$'000	24/3/90 FEDERAL \$'000	27/10/90 NT \$'000	*24/5/91 NSW \$'000				
Expenditure Component																												
Not Supplied																												
Not Supplied																												
Advertising, publicity	-	-	75	25	258	-	391	2735	855	301	26	193	1209	-	87	4717	-	1000	-	1064	845	-	41	638	656	7415	22	2117
Computer Services	-	-	4	-	49	-	14	235	35	-	-	8	27	-	-	659	32	-	66	-	66	71	-	360 ¹	1936	-	33	
Non voter processing	9	-	-	-	-	-	130	71	-	69	-	28	-	-	-	539	380	-	191	-	30	65	-	785	-	2	683	
Postage, telephone	-	-	40	71	167	-	127	1067	155	46	19	57	82	17	2443	313	181	94	-	-	55	-	363 ²	2083	10	408		
Printing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Polling Booth hire	-	-	50	8	42	-	39	469 ³	-	39	53 ⁴	10	64	-	5	330	101	-	107	1	63 ⁵	92	-	82	445	18	288	
RO premises hire	-	-	-	-	-	-	153	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	449	284	-	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	576		
Other premises hire	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Printing & election	-	-	113	-	184	227	14	-	230	2387	246	184	23	202	142	63	6945	1204	1389	511	65	232	27	209	551	101	1469	
Role/Carroll lists	-	-	72	-	-	-	389 ⁶	-	352	13	129	88	31	-	384	12	253	408	-	72	23	68	284	-	1086	-	883	
Roll scanning	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	932	160	-	-	-	-	8	-	631	-	302		
roll consolidation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Staff - polling & election	-	-	624	802	1163	-	4347	14620	66	996	433 ⁷	1113	1443	-	112	14821	6211	-	905	1629	532 ⁸	1133	2048	16510	89	7664		
Staff - RO fees & allowances	-	-	60	164	307	-	297	253	-	103	-	121	386	-	-	294	442	-	431	254	-	119	464	234	-	614		
Staff - overtime	-	-	19	70	47	-	48	1711	42	20	-	55	881	-	-	2357	163	61	123	-	41	58	1621	21	215			
Staff - training	-	-	12	-	67	-	30	654	-	52	-	1	68	-	-	1128	60	-	-	-	-	51 ⁹	102	-	1108	-	78	
(Electoral material)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	68	-	-	-	-	7	-	61	-	-	-		
Statistics & election results	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Tally room	-	-	20	-	82	-	37	134	-	10	2	7	27	-	-	208	70	-	229	34	1	24	78	283	5	95		
(including staff)	-	-	1	38	361	-	118	986	104	30	4	50	218	3	1833	386	201	76	7	77	233	697	21	402				
Temporary freight	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Special Voting	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Antarctic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Visitor (hospitals)	-	-	20	-	88	-	-	127	-	23	-	-	104	-	-	177	-	-	-	-	-	39	120	-	-	-		
Mobile polling	-	-	20	-	-	-	-	120	-	22	-	-	-	-	-	127	141	-	-	-	-	26	-	171	-	123		
Overseas	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	204	-	-	-	-	9	-	-	195	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	155	-	5		
Miscellaneous	8445	-	48	18	11	-	188	117	5088	92	1	-	67	14	1882	572	3804 ¹⁰	51	51	4	68	79	1403	10	751			
Extraordinary	-	-	135	-	-	-	150 ¹¹	3835	-	108 ¹²	-	-	-	-	-	2011	-	-	-	-	131 ¹³	47	-	130 ¹⁴	536 ¹⁵			
Total Expenditure	3638	-	1275	1413	3028	-	6640	38876	6641	2125	692	1897	4200	378	38862	12142	10627	3801	778	2965	6538	42833	650	16973				
Expenditure on advertising	3638 ¹⁶	-	1200	1388	2770	-	6249	28141	5785	1824	566	1704	2991	341	34145	11142	9533	3163	737	2327	4552	35418	628	14856				
Electors on roll	2453642	-	871215	754225	1488205	-	33300350	8969217	2641477	905907	290277	883239	1563294	74633	10353219	3541447	2739614	957939	31066	941368	1780765	1066875	82261	669	3631631			
Cost per elector (\$)	1.46 ¹⁷	-	1.38	1.64	1.90	-	1.88	2.65	2.19	2.01	1.95	1.63	1.91	4.57	3.30	3.15	3.48	3.30	2.38	2.47	2.66	3.32	6.41	4.09				
**Constant Dec 1991	2.68	-	2.36	3.11	3.06	-	2.96	4.34	3.28	2.86	2.71	2.69	2.51	5.93	4.16	3.82	3.95	3.66	2.59	2.61	2.71	3.49	6.45	4.14				

Footnotes

- a Advertising costs not available - included in miscellaneous expenditure. This figure includes advertising costs
- b Includes advertising costs
- c Cost of Legislative Council scrutiny
- d National. Total cost of printed material, including rolls and certified lists was \$365,000
- e Cost of Legislative Council scrutiny
- f Cost of Legislative Council scrutiny
- g Includes all staff and training costs
- h Cost of roll production costs
- i Cost of roll production costs
- j Includes all staff and training costs
- k Cost of Legislative Council Scrutiny \$94,000. Pre-poll voting \$37,000
- l Includes cost of non-voter processing
- m Cost of seconded NT public service staff, cost of establishment and staffing of temporary regional offices and cost of airfares and travelling allowances of officers seconded from other electoral administrations
- n Cost of Legislative Council scrutiny

Information in this table is extrapolated from numerous submissions from all Commissions.

APPENDIX 6

JOINT ROLLS

The AEC notes that there are different models of joint roll operations in some States and different methods of cooperation in others. It acknowledges that the service provided under existing agreements may not meet present day needs in some areas.

However, the continuous development of its new roll management systems (RMANS) has increased the level of service that can be provided to States. Further enhancements are in development.

In its negotiations with the Queensland authorities for a joint roll arrangement the AEC developed a model for a common roll which is believed to have universal applicability, and which accords with the wishes of the Federal Government, which will shortly be communicated at a more formal level, that each State/Territory bear an equal share with the Commonwealth of the ongoing costs of roll maintenance.

A MODEL JOINT ROLL

1. The joint roll should be a common roll. In order to reduce public confusion State legislation should embody similar eligibility criteria to that of the Commonwealth or a blanket provision accepting Commonwealth Electoral Act criteria. Where administrative practices need to be legislated these should be as for the Commonwealth.
2. By definition a common roll should be on a single database. This database should be maintained by the AEC and be linked to a national system. Federal, State and LGA boundaries (internal and external) should be included.
3. The roll system should provide a facility which allows approved State authorities secure access to the State roll or, alternatively, transfers data to the State for approved purposes.
4. The cost of maintaining the roll, including the cost of habitation reviews, should be equitable (that is, 50% each) shared by the AEC and the State. If the State wishes to include local government with the cost sharing the AEC will be happy to consider appropriate arrangements. Be negotiation, products specific to the Commonwealth, State or Local Government would be charged to the user. The costs referred to above do not include such existing AEC overheads as staff and accommodation, but would include any additional staff required specifically for State needs.
5. Given that State requirements will place additional burdens and complexities on AEC divisional workloads, computerisation of those offices should be pursued. As meeting State requirements would be a significant reason for computerisation, State could be expected to contribute to the capital costs involved as well as to the operating costs.

6. A joint management committee consisting of officers from the State electoral authority and the AEC (and Local Government if appropriate) should be established to ensure that suers' needs are met in a cooperative and planned way.

APPENDIX 7

TABLE 1
SUMMARY-
NOTIONAL TOTAL AEC EXPENDITURE ON GATHERING INFORMATION
FOR, AND MAINTAINING, ELECTORAL ROLLS
(Rounded to nearest \$100,000)

1 ESTIMATE OF A NOTIONAL 'BASE' YEAR	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
DIRECT OPERATIONAL EXPENSES			
Computer System, including RMANS system costs	4,200-5,000		
EAGLE processing costs	400		
Computer Consumables	200-300		
Additional Staffing costs of External Staff under Contract	600-700		
Development and Production of Forms	200-300		
Postage	900-1,000		
Micrographic Production of Forms	200-300		
Freight	200-300		
Miscellaneous	100-200		
TOTAL DIRECT OPERATIONAL EXPENSES	7,000-8,500		
COMPUTER SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT			
Estimate of annualised identified development costs		600	
ESTIMATED NOTIONAL ANNUALISED ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT COSTS			
Operational Support Staff - Divisions			
Ongoing Enrolment	2,300-3,000		
Redistributions	1,500		
Electoral Roll Review	3,800		
Election-generated enrolment activity	1,500		
SUBTOTAL	9,100-9,800		
Operational Support Staff - Head/Central Offices	2,000-2,200		
Administrative Support Staff	1,700-1,800		
Other Administrative Support Costs	7,200-7,000		
TOTAL ESTIMATES NOTIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT COSTS	20,000-21,500		
ESTIMATED NOTIONAL RECURRENT AND CAPITAL 'BASE' YEAR COSTS		27,600-30,600	

TABLE 1 (continued)

2 EXPENDITURE ON EVENTS OCCURRING ON AN IRREGULAR BASIS

Electoral Roll Reviews	6,900
CCD Alignment	50
Redistribution	500
Roll Print	200
Federal Election Close of Rolls	450
TOTAL NOTIONAL ANNUALISED IRREGULAR EXPENDITURE	8,100
3 TOTAL ESTIMATED NOTIONAL ANNUALISED EXPENDITURE BY THE AEC THAT COULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO MAINTAINING ELECTORAL ROLLS	
	35,700-38,700