



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Inquiry into the conduct of the 2025 federal election

Interim Report

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

June 2026

CANBERRA

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Chair's foreword

We have every reason to be proud of our electoral system.

It is fair, trusted and in many respects the envy of the world. Since Federation, our electoral processes, from early voting, pre-poll and election day, have operated under laws and conventions that Australians embrace and have become used to.

From the famed democracy sausage and cake stalls fundraising for the school P&C, to the usually healthy and respectful competition at the polling place between volunteers, election day is our carnival of democracy. In most cases they are welcome, fun and represent a genuine expression of support in our electoral process.

However, at the 2025 election in many contested electorates across Australia, our carnival of democracy was under assault.

In recent years, the polarisation of the electorates and the growing threat of aggressive third party involvement has shaken the foundations of the voting process for polling place volunteers, electoral commission workers and, most importantly, voters.

It is clear, through the evidence received so far, that any assault on democracy needs to be addressed. Submissions warn of a new normal if the experiences of 2025 are repeated, one where our celebrated democracy would head down the path of hyper-partisanship and institutionalised intimidation.

Voting is obligatory in Australia, as such there is a duty on the Commonwealth to make sure that every place of voting is inviting, safe and fit for purpose. Submissions about the 2025 election tell us that a line had been crossed, the conventions have been deliberately broken, and that the Government needs to address it.

Events abroad have shown us that democracy is fragile, that it can be eroded, and in some cases broken. We shouldn't sit back while the foundations for mirroring these events begin to occur here - and we shouldn't fear applying remedy when needed.

Mr Jerome Laxale MP
Chair

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Abbreviations

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALP	Australian Labor Party
EIAT	Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce
PAT	Public Access Terminal



Committee membership

Chair

Mr Jerome Laxale MP

Bennelong, NSW

Deputy Chair

Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck

LP, TAS

Members

Mr Matt Burnell MP (*from 7 October 2025 to 23 March 2026*)

Spence, SA

Ms Julie-Ann Campbell MP

Moreton, QLD

Senator Karen Grogan

ALP, SA

Senator Steph Hodgins-May

AG, VIC

Senator the Hon James McGrath

LNP, QLD

Senator Corinne Mulholland

ALP, QLD

Hon Shayne Neumann MP

Blair, QLD

Ms Alicia Payne MP (*from 28 July 2025 to 7 October 2025, from 23 March 2026*)

Canberra, ACT

Dr Monique Ryan MP

Kooyong, VIC

Mr Ben Small MP (*from 10 March 2026*)

Forrest, WA

Mr Rick Wilson MP (*from 29 July 2025 to 10 March 2026*)

O'Connor, WA



Terms of reference

That the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquire into and report on all aspects of the conduct of the 2025 federal election and related matters, including consideration of the following:

- assessment and review of the purported increase in incidents of aggressive conduct, deliberate obstruction, and intimidating behaviour towards voters, political participants, volunteers, and Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) officials;
- potential reform of safety and security arrangements, including consideration of the powers, processes, and capacity of the AEC to manage and address increasingly threatening or disruptive behaviour;
- the suitability and potential reform of measures to ensure universal voter access, including polling booth availability and location, early voting, remote polling, and postal voting arrangements; and
- the suitability of the current authorisation framework and requirements, having regard to the evolution of communication methods and technology.

The Special Minister of State has also asked the Committee to consider the interaction with the following:

- the implementation and operation of the electoral reform passed by the 47th Parliament, particularly regarding the use of money or capital in the most recent election;
- reforms to address the ongoing threats of interference in our electoral system, both foreign and domestic; and
- the composition of the Parliament as a whole, including: the length of the parliamentary term; the potential for fixed terms; and the number of elected representatives relative to the growth in population and the electorate.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 2.56** That the Australian Electoral Commission be adequately resourced and supported to enforce any such changes outlined in the recommendations of this report.

Recommendation 2

- 2.57** The Committee recommends that the thresholds under the significant third party and associated entity frameworks be reviewed to ensure that coordinated involvement in the electoral process at scale is adequately captured.

Recommendation 3

- 2.58** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduces legislation to amend the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to provide a statutory framework for the Australian Electoral Commissioner to make an enforceable and mandatory code of conduct for candidates, elected representatives, campaign workers, third party participants, and volunteers within and around federal polling booths.

Recommendation 4

- 2.59** The Committee recommends that, in developing the code of conduct, the Australian Electoral Commissioner be required to undertake open consultation with political participants.

Recommendation 5

- 2.60** The Committee recommends that to increase accountability of behaviour at polling places, the Australian Electoral Commissioner develop and maintain a system of registration of polling booth campaigners by candidates and third parties campaigning at polling places.

Recommendation 6

- 2.61** The Committee recommends that all candidates, elected representatives, campaign workers, third party participants, and volunteers be required to

formally register their agreement to comply with the code of conduct prior to working on a polling booth.

Recommendation 7

- 2.62** The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission be granted additional statutory powers to address aggressive behaviour and misconduct at polling places, including but not limited to:
- issuing warnings to volunteers who breach the newly developed code of conduct
 - directing volunteers to leave the polling place for a defined period of time in cases involving repeated or egregious breaches of the code of conduct.

Recommendation 8

- 2.63** The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission develops and delivers comprehensive training for senior polling place officials on enforcing the code of conduct, and on when and how to escalate responses to incidents at polling places.

Recommendation 9

- 2.64** The Committee recommends that a new ‘campaign zone’ be created beyond the six-metre exclusion zone for each polling location in which:
- the code of conduct is enforced
 - polling place workers must be registered
 - the numbers of campaigners and campaign signage is to be reduced and regulated on a per candidate and per third party basis.

Recommendation 10

- 2.68** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake a review of electoral laws with a view to protect the electoral process and voter experience from domestic interference.

Recommendation 11

- 2.71** The Committee recommends that, due to privacy and safety risks, the Australian Government take urgent action to develop guidelines or amend such legislation as would be required to ensure that the use of public access terminals is limited to electoral purposes only and that users are known to the Electoral Commissioner.

Recommendation 12

- 3.24** The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission reviews the resourcing requirements and duration of pre-poll voting to ensure adequate arrangements are in place, noting the increasing numbers of electors voting by ordinary pre-poll and the need to ensure the safety and quality of the voter experience.

Recommendation 13

- 3.27** The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission sets the goal of ensuring that the majority of polling places in each electorate are physically accessible, provide step-free access for mobility assistance devices, have sufficient toilet facilities available for public use, and have sufficient and clearly marked accessible parking bays close to the entrance.

Recommendation 14

- 4.25** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduces legislation to amend the authorisation framework and requirements for electoral matter under the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to ensure:
- voters know who communications come from, including who is paying for communications if it is not the person or entity authorising the communications
 - communications are traceable to facilitate enforcement, including where a person or entity does not have a regular physical presence at the address listed in an authorisation
 - those participating in public debate are accountable for their communications, including where material is distributed without reasonable endeavours to comply with authorisation rules
 - that the AEC is empowered to enforce authorisation requirements including removal or blocking of non-compliant material, both physical and online.



1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since 1987, a joint committee has been established to inquire into and report on the conduct of the most recent federal election at the commencement of each Parliament. This tradition was continued in the 48th Parliament when the House of Representatives, and later the Senate, passed a resolution appointing the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (the Committee).¹
- 1.2 In recent times the Committee has adopted a practice of tabling an interim report partway through its inquiry. This practice allows the Committee to make key recommendations available to the Parliament with sufficient time for those recommendations to be considered and implemented ahead of the next federal election.
- 1.3 Not all of the terms of reference have been addressed in this interim report. It is the intent of the Committee to address these terms of reference in the final report, due November 2026.

Referral of the inquiry and terms of reference

- 1.4 On 3 September 2025, the Committee adopted an inquiry into the conduct of the 2025 federal election following a letter from the Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon Don Farrell, requesting the inquiry. The terms of reference for the inquiry encapsulate all aspects of the conduct of the 2025 federal election and related matters, but draw particular attention to the following areas:
 - assessment and review of the purported increase in incidents of aggressive conduct, deliberate obstruction, and intimidating behaviour towards voters, political participants, volunteers, and Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) officials;
 - potential reform of safety and security arrangements, including consideration of the powers, processes, and capacity of the AEC to manage and address increasingly threatening or disruptive behaviour;
 - the suitability and potential reform of measures to ensure universal voter access, including polling booth availability and location, early voting, remote polling, and postal voting arrangements; and
 - the suitability of the current authorisation framework and requirements, having regard to the evolution of communication methods and technology.

¹ *Votes and Proceedings*, No. 2, 23 July 2025, pp. 59–60; *Journals of the Senate*, No. 3, 24 July 2025, pp. 118–120.

The Special Minister of State also asked the Committee to consider the interaction with the following matters:

- the implementation and operation of the electoral reform passed by the 47th Parliament, particularly regarding the use of money or capital in the most recent election;
- reforms to address the ongoing threats of interference in our electoral system, both foreign and domestic; and
- the composition of the Parliament as a whole, including: the length of the parliamentary term; the potential for fixed terms; and the number of elected representatives relative to the growth in population and the electorate.

1.5 The terms of reference were further expanded on 1 April 2026 by resolution of the Committee to review Part III Division 3 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

Conduct of the inquiry to date

Calling for submissions

1.6 The Committee announced its inquiry in a media release on 3 September 2025 and called for submissions to the inquiry. Submissions initially closed on 14 November 2025, but were reopened between 1 December 2025 and 28 February 2026 in recognition of the strong community interest in the inquiry.

1.7 The Committee has so far received 360 submissions to the inquiry, which are listed in Appendix A.

Treatment of submissions

1.8 This inquiry has attracted a substantial number of submissions containing adverse reflections on electoral participants, and in particular, third parties. This reflects both the contents of the terms of reference for this inquiry and trends in the tone of political debate more generally.

1.9 On 15 October 2025, the Committee resolved that where submissions contain adverse reflections, identifying information of any individuals, candidates, registered political parties, and independents be redacted. While certain cases have called for limited exceptions to be made, this resolution has remained the rule.

1.10 While acknowledging the importance of having a free and open debate over the issues related to this inquiry, the Committee also considers it important that submissions to the inquiry do not operate as a vehicle for advancing untested allegations under the protection of parliamentary privilege.

1.11 Further, due to the nature of some of the behaviour during the electoral process, confidentiality enabled electoral participants to speak freely on sensitive matters including threats to their personal safety and standing in their local community.

Public hearings

- 1.12 As of the time of this report's publication the Committee had held 12 public hearings throughout 2025 and 2026, including hearings in Canberra, Melbourne, Berkeley, Sydney, Brisbane, Ipswich, and Adelaide. The Committee will continue to gather evidence at future public hearings to inform its final report.
- 1.13 A detailed list of the public hearings conducted to date is available at Appendix B.

Report purpose and structure

- 1.14 The purpose of the interim report is to enable the Committee to outline its early findings and make initial recommendations. This enables the Parliament and the Australian Government to consider these findings, prepare legislative and policy changes, and enact them prior to the next election.
- 1.15 This report does not present exhaustive evidence as received by the Committee to date. The Committee may seek to provide further information that addresses its recommendations as required in its final report.
- 1.16 Chapter 1 sets out the relevant background to the inquiry.
- 1.17 Chapter 2 considers:
- increased incidents of aggressive conduct, deliberate obstruction, and intimidating behaviour seen throughout the election, with a particular focus on addressing the actions of third party organisations
 - reports of antisocial conduct and alleged links with an increase of third party actors
 - the need to reform safety and security arrangements around elections, including the need to create additional powers to regulate campaigner conduct, to combat domestic interference, and to tighten controls around public access terminals (PATs).
- 1.18 Chapter 3 considers voter experience in accessing polling booths during the election, including pre-polling.
- 1.19 Chapter 4 examines the suitability of the current authorisation framework for electoral advertising, with a particular focus on issues pertaining to the lack of clarity concerning third parties, the changing social media landscape, and the influence of artificial intelligence on elections.



2. Antisocial conduct, safety and security arrangements

2.1 This chapter addresses:

- the increased alleged incidents of antisocial conduct seen throughout the 2025 federal election, including aggressive conduct, deliberate obstruction, and intimidating behaviour
- the role of third party organisations in fostering antisocial behaviour
- the need to reform safety and security arrangements around elections, including the need to create additional powers to regulate campaigner conduct, to combat domestic interference, and to tighten controls around public access terminals (PATs).

Antisocial behaviour

2.2 Australia's democracy has long been considered among the healthiest and most vibrant in the world with generally high standards of conduct by involved parties. However, evidence received thus far suggests that at the 2025 federal election, particularly in contested electorates, conduct was of such a poor standard that it requires treatment. While isolated instances of antisocial behaviour have been observed in prior elections, a large proportion of submitters indicated that antisocial conduct was unusually prevalent in the 2025 election.¹ One participant in the Ipswich hearing described the experience to be 'absolutely mind-blowingly different to any experience that I've had' and 'more like a war zone than it was a polling booth'.²

2.3 Evidence from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), election participants and observers raised concerns regarding voters, political participants, and poll workers being subjected to alleged aggressive, obstructive, and intimidating behaviour. Allegations of antisocial conduct that directly interfered with the voting experience and process, as reported by the AEC and others included behaviour such as:

- yelling and verbal abuse³

¹ See, for example, Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), *Submission 4*, pp. 2–3; Australian Labor Party (ALP), *Submission 322*, pp. 1–2; Mr Arkin Daniel-Reid, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 3; Ms Sussan Barrett, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 4; Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP, *Submission 173*, p. 1; Name withheld, *Submission 177*, pp. (1)–(2); Name withheld, *Submission 95*, pp. (3)–(12).

² Madonna, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2025, p. 27.

³ See, for example, AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 64*, p. (1); Name withheld, *Submission 71*, p. (1); Margaret Callinan, *Submission 133*, pp. (1)–(2); ALP, *Submission 322*, p. 2.

- alleged harassment or intimidation of volunteers and voters⁴
- blocking walkways⁵
- ‘aggressively shepherding’ vulnerable voters such as older persons or those with mobility issues⁶
- ‘bombarding’ voters with signs and campaign material⁷
- acts of physical aggression, including physically obstructing and pushing other volunteers, invading their personal space, ‘standing over’ others, and following people from booths or stalking.⁸

2.4 Evidence was heard, particularly from women, on how the aforementioned behaviour had impacted them to a much greater degree than others. In particular, multiple submissions outlined how male volunteers frequently used their size to physically dominate and crowd female volunteers,⁹ with threatening gestures in a notable instance,¹⁰ and being targeted and filmed without their consent.¹¹

2.5 These issues were particularly prominent in certain locations such as metropolitan Melbourne, metropolitan Sydney, and in electorates where seats were viewed as ‘close or contestable’.¹²

2.6 The AEC indicated that it received complaints from both the public and its own staff in relation to antisocial behaviour during the campaign, receiving over 550 public complaints in relation to ‘voter harassment and intimidation by campaign workers’. An additional 59 complaints in relation to threats to harm involving AEC staff were recorded during the 2025 federal election, nine of which resulted in police referral.¹³ However, it is unclear whether these rates marked a significant departure from previous elections due to changes in the AEC’s complaint reporting system.¹⁴

2.7 Instances of antisocial and threatening behaviour were also reported by parliamentarians, political parties and candidates, revealing increasing rates of

⁴ See, for example, AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 47*, p. (1); Name withheld, *Submission 302*, p. 2; ALP, *Submission 322*, p. 1.

⁵ See, for example, AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 33*, p. (1); Jerrabomberra Residents Association, *Submission 66*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 95*, p. (1).

⁶ See, for example, Ray Peck, *Submission 39*, p. (1); Narooma Branch, *Submission 41*, p. 1.

⁷ See, for example, AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 2; Kyneton Party Branch, *Submission 44*, p. (1); Constituents in the seat of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 Kooyong campaign, *Submission 129*, p. 15; Mrs Meryll Bartley, *Committee Hansard*, 10 December 2025, p. 37.

⁸ See, for example, Name withheld, *Submission 20*, pp. (1)–(2); Ms Cecilia Hannon, *Submission 40*, p. 2; Mr Bernie Ross, *Submission 114*, p. (2); Name withheld, *Submission 277*, p. (3); Dr Victoria Fielding, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 36; Ms Cassandra Barrett, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2025, p. 33; Witness 7, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2025, p. 35.

⁹ See, for example, Name withheld, *Submission 26*, p. 1; Ms Catherine Duloy, *Submission 55*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 185*, p. (1); Hon Rachel Nolan, *Submission 256*, p. (2).

¹⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 138 Attachment 1*, p. (4).

¹¹ Australian Greens, *Submission 118*, p. 2.

¹² Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 2.

¹³ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 2; Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 12.

¹⁴ Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 3.

targeted abuse or threats. The Australian Federal Police (AFP) reported a 17 per cent increase in threats against candidates during the 2025 election compared to the 2022 election period.¹⁵ Representatives of the AFP observed that 70 per cent of cases investigated by AFP on these matters involved either personal threats to candidates or using social media platforms to threaten candidates.¹⁶ The Australian Labor Party (ALP) similarly stated that it received accounts of ‘increased aggressive and intimidatory behaviour at pre-poll centres and polling booths towards voters, volunteers and candidates’.¹⁷

Third parties’ influence on behaviour

- 2.8 A significant proportion of evidence thus far gathered linked reports of antisocial behaviour at polling places with the alleged involvement of third parties. These third party campaigners were particularly prevalent in seats that were considered highly contested or marginal, which is where a significant proportion of alleged aggressive conduct originated – as noted in 2.5.
- 2.9 ‘Third parties’ in the context of the electoral system generally refers to individuals or organisations who are not candidates or a registered political party but nonetheless play a substantial role in influencing the electoral process. This may be through means such as campaigning, public advocacy, or expenditure. Third parties may focus on a specific issue or on a more diverse or broad message. Certain third parties (otherwise known as ‘significant third parties’) meeting specific thresholds under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) are subject to a range of regulatory treatments. This includes transparency requirements, spending limits, and disclosure regimes for donation and political expenditure.
- 2.10 The AEC noted that the role of third parties in elections is expanding, reporting that they ‘detected more single or limited issues motivated groups or individuals campaigning in this election than in previous elections’. This resulted in the AEC engaging with ‘around 130 new entities or individuals ... in relation to their potential disclosure obligations as a campaigner’.¹⁸ Importantly, the AEC reported that these entities or individuals often displayed a lack of awareness or knowledge regarding electoral law and practices.¹⁹
- 2.11 The Committee heard of concern about well-coordinated third party organisations running significant campaigns at polling booths without appropriate transparency about who they were.²⁰ Some witnesses provided accounts of apparently coordinated engagement by groups who had not generally been strongly represented in campaigning cohorts previously. This included significantly increased presence

¹⁵ Mr Nigel Ryan, Acting Deputy Commissioner, National Security, Australian Federal Police, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2025, p. 38.

¹⁶ Mr Nigel Ryan, Acting Deputy Commissioner, National Security, Australian Federal Police, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2025, p. 37.

¹⁷ ALP, *Submission 322*, pp. 1–2.

¹⁸ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

¹⁹ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

²⁰ Mr Simon Holmes a Court, Convenor, Climate 200, *Committee Hansard*, 6 March 2026.

across a range of electorates,²¹ supported by substantial amounts of campaign material,²² and use of shared slogans.²³

- 2.12 Other witnesses asserted that the presence and conduct of third parties at polling booths had a direct impact on antisocial behaviour. Concerning behaviour allegedly specifically involving third parties included:
- excessively large numbers of third party workers or volunteers attending booths or pre-poll places, overwhelming capacity in small spaces
 - candidates being hidden or blocked from view and harassed, including one candidate reporting that voters wishing to speak to her being told ‘you don’t want to speak to the liar’²⁴
 - campaign workers being harassed, blocked or prevented from approaching members of the public by third party workers or volunteers.²⁵

These behaviours were argued to have had a strong negative impact on all participants. Members of the public were said to be overwhelmed by the number of campaign workers, intimidated by their antisocial behaviour, and fearful for their safety.²⁶ Voters in particular demographics, such as older Australians, were reported to have expressed their intention never to vote in person again due to the antisocial conduct.²⁷ Campaign workers also expressed their distress at the behaviour exhibited and intimidatory practices.²⁸ It also caused navigation issues in terms of physical access to booths.²⁹

- 2.13 In addition to this, this influx in aggressive and intimidatory behaviour, combined with the volume of signage and volume of volunteers, has been described as a ‘full sensory experience’³⁰ – this is to the detriment of voters with sensory issues and has a negative effect on accessibility.

Reforming polling place behaviour

- 2.14 In addition to the antisocial conduct discussed above, safety and security concerns were a key theme across evidence thus far received by the Committee. Many submitters noted that the antisocial behaviour prompted concerns regarding the

²¹ See, for example, Mr Benjamin Woodbury, *Committee Hansard*, 27 March 2026, pp. 1–2 and 4; Mrs Cassandra Davies, *Committee Hansard*, 27 March 2026, p. 9; Hon Rachel Nolan, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2025, p. 8.

²² Mr Benjamin Woodbury, *Committee Hansard*, 27 March 2026, p. 4.

²³ See, for example, Ms Catherine Duloy, *Submission 55*, p. 2; Jerrabomberra Residents Association, *Submission 66*, p. 2; Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 4.

²⁴ Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP, *Submission 305*, pp. 1–2.

²⁵ Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP, *Submission 305*, p. 1; ALP, *Submission 322*, p. 2.

²⁶ Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP, *Submission 305*, p. 1.

²⁷ Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP, *Submission 305*, p. 1.

²⁸ Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP, *Submission 305*, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 2.

³⁰ Mr George Simon, Assistant General Secretary, New South Wales Branch, Australian Labor Party, *Committee Hansard*, 20 November 2025, p. 7.

physical safety of voters, campaign workers, AEC staff and others present at polling booths. This section reviews potential methods of improving safety and security.

- 2.15 While noting the importance of maintaining order and positive social behaviour at polling booths, reforms to this end must be made carefully and with consideration for legal protections regarding freedom of expression and political belief. As noted by the AEC, any approach to apply additional restrictions in a federal election would need to be balanced with the constitutionally implied freedom of political communication.³¹

An election participants' code of conduct

- 2.16 Many witnesses supported the introduction of a code of conduct for election campaign workers to respond to the antisocial conduct observed and experienced during the 2025 election at polling places and its impact on voter experience.³² A number of witnesses reflected on the accountability of candidates for the conduct of their workers, volunteers or campaigners.³³ It was suggested a code should 'outline the responsibilities of candidates in promoting a safe environment for everyone'.³⁴
- 2.17 Many established political participants already have an internal code of conduct, but the Committee believes that there is a need to formalise this, given the amount of third party involvement, and as these third parties do not have the same structures or accountability as established political participants.
- 2.18 Noting the concerns about antisocial conduct and similar frameworks governing antisocial behaviour during elections in the states and territories, the AEC outlined potential options for introducing a code of conduct regarding campaigner behaviour. One of the options suggested was for the AEC to 'lead a consultative design process to develop a code of conduct for parties and candidates to publicly adopt, including measures for parties and candidates to implement to give it effect'.³⁵
- 2.19 This proposal was supported by stakeholders, arguing that a code of conduct should incorporate an expected behaviour standard.³⁶ Other witnesses advocated the view that a code should have broader limitations regarding specific antisocial conduct

³¹ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

³² Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 8; Dr Jill Sheppard, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 8; Witness 1, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2026, p. 47; Hon. Rachel Nolan, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2025, p. 12; Ms Carol Berry MP, Member for Whitlam, Commonwealth Parliament, *Committee Hansard*, 19 November 2025, p. 4; Mr Pearce, *Committee Hansard*, 19 November 2025, p. 9; Mr Ross Hannah, *Committee Hansard*, 19 November 2025, p. 23; Ms Susan Barrett, Volunteer Trainer and Volunteer, Team Zoe—Volunteer Team for Zoe Daniel's 2025 Campaign, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 6; Mr Arkin Daniel Reid, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 2; Dr Victoria Fielding, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 39; Ms Joanna Wells, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 44; Mr Tim Wade, Volunteers for the 2025 Kooyong Independent campaign, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 11.

³³ Ms Gibb, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 37. See also Mr Arkin Daniel Reid, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 2, and Ms Carol Berry MP, Member for Whitlam, Commonwealth Parliament, *Committee Hansard*, 19 November 2025, p. 7.

³⁴ Mr Arkin Daniel Reid, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 2.

³⁵ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

³⁶ Mr Ross Hannah, *Committee Hansard*, 19 November 2025, p. 23.

such as hateful and violent language;³⁷ however, many of these limitations currently exist in antidiscrimination and other forms of law.

- 2.20 To complement a code, the AEC recommended 'strengthening enforcement mechanisms and penalties for non-compliance with campaign rules'.³⁸ The code would also be supported by training and education provided by the AEC to election participants to improve awareness of obligations and requirements under electoral law.³⁹
- 2.21 Additionally, multiple stakeholders advocated for a formal or informal register for campaign volunteers to accompany a code. The purpose of a register would be to improve transparency and accountability, for both individuals undertaking antisocial conduct and for parties and organisations in being responsible for their workers or volunteers.⁴⁰

AEC powers

- 2.22 A key theme raised in evidence related to the AEC's powers to manage antisocial conduct, safety and security.
- 2.23 The AEC's powers in relation to polling places are largely restricted to within the six-metre boundary from the entrance to a polling place. This limitation is prescribed by section 340 of the Electoral Act, which outlines a range of prohibited behaviour near polling booths and pre-polling voting places. This includes the following prohibitions:
- canvassing for votes
 - soliciting votes
 - inducing a voter not to vote for a particular candidate
 - inducing an elector not to vote in an election
 - exhibiting a notice or sign relating to an election within six metres of a polling booth or pre-polling voting office.
- 2.24 It also prohibits undertaking these activities if using a loudspeaker, public address or other broadcasting equipment or device six metres or more from a polling booth or pre-polling voting office. The penalty for any of these offences is currently five penalty units.⁴¹

³⁷ Mr Arkin Daniel Reid, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 2.

³⁸ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 4.

³⁹ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Dr Victoria Fielding, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 39; Ms Helen Schutz, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 40; Ms Joanna Wells, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, pp. 44 and 45; Hon Rachel Nolan, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2025, p. 14; Name withheld, *Submission 56*, p. (3); Ms Joanna Wells, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 45.

⁴¹ A Commonwealth penalty unit is a monetary amount is prescribed by the *Crimes Act 1914*. The current value as of 28 May 2026 is \$330 per penalty unit.

- 2.25 The AEC's powers beyond that zone are limited to regulating the authorisation of campaign communications.⁴²
- 2.26 The limitations of the AEC's powers outside of the six-metre exclusion zone were raised consistently in evidence.⁴³ A repeated observation in the evidence received was that AEC officials are not empowered to manage aggressive behaviour or able to enforce existing rules regarding conduct outside of that zone. In its submission, the AEC advised that it had encouraged its temporary election workforce to contact local police in the event of individuals feeling unsafe, for the protection of staff, the public and campaign workers.⁴⁴

Creation and regulation of a 'campaign zone'

- 2.27 Considerable representations were made regarding strengthening controls around polling places to increase safety and security arrangements as well as to improve voter experience. This included extending the range of the area around polling places in which campaign conduct is regulated by the AEC, creating a campaign zone beyond the six-metre exclusion zone.⁴⁵
- 2.28 The Committee heard from a range of sources that the six-metre exclusion zone creates an imposing and intimidating gauntlet effect, concentrating competing and often aggressive demands for attention from campaign participants and materials that all voters had to pass through.⁴⁶ The Committee also heard of factors that increased intensity at polling places, such as competition for signage and set-up of polling booths creating 'an intensity amongst volunteers that is a recipe for volatility'.⁴⁷
- 2.29 Further, the six-metre exclusion zone was reported to have been breached multiple times by campaigners.⁴⁸ The Committee also heard about contravention of the rules regarding use of broadcasting equipment at polling places, creating disruption that 'was deafening and could be heard 200 metres away'.⁴⁹
- 2.30 While the composition and dimensions of a campaign zone and suggestions regarding restrictions within the zone differed across submissions, it was generally

⁴² AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

⁴³ See, for example; Name withheld, *Submission 84*, p. 3; Mr Henry Moore, *Submission 206*, pp. 2–3; Constituents in the seat of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 Kooyong campaign, *Submission 129*, p. 19; Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁴ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ See for example, Constituents in the seat of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 Kooyong campaign, *Submission 129*, pp. 4–5; Australian Labor Party, *Submission 322*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 23*, p. (2).

⁴⁶ Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP, *Submission 173*, p. (1); Ms Naomi Oakley, *Submission 29*, p. (1); Name withheld, *Submission 35*, p. (1); Democracy Matters, *Submission 236*, p. 6; Voices for Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Mr George Simon, Assistant General Secretary, New South Wales Branch, Australian Labor Party, *Committee Hansard*, 20 November 2025, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP, *Submission 305*, pp. 2 and 4; Name Withheld, *Submission 44*, p. (1).

⁴⁹ Name withheld, *Submission 64*, p. (1).

agreed that an extended campaign zone, coupled with regulated behaviour standards, would improve safety and comfort for all participants and voters.⁵⁰

- 2.31 Some submitters also considered that a code of conduct (see above) should apply within this zone.⁵¹ Witnesses also expressed concerns about the volume of signage creating hazardous conditions for members of the public, with calls for limits on permitted signage including in an extended campaign zone.⁵²

Interference in electoral processes

- 2.32 The Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce (EIAT) provides electoral integrity assurance to the Australian Electoral Commissioner that federal electoral events are unaffected by interference. For the purposes of the EIAT, interference is characterised as a foreign government or their proxy undertaking an action that is intended to affect or disrupt Australian electoral processes or outcomes.⁵³
- 2.33 The Committee heard that the EIAT provides advice to the Australian Electoral Commissioner on matters that may compromise the real or perceived integrity of a federal electoral event and the trust of the public in the outcome of an election.⁵⁴ As well as physical security, such as people being too intimidated to attend a polling place or feeling disinclined to participate, this interference might be related to mis or disinformation; foreign interference, being activity intended to influence an individual's political rights or undermine the national interest; or a cybersecurity incident.⁵⁵
- 2.34 On 1 July 2025, the EIAT published its advice to the Electoral Commissioner that EIAT agencies did not identify any foreign interference, or any other interference, that compromised the 2025 federal election and would undermine the confidence of the Australian people in the results of the election.⁵⁶
- 2.35 Australia is internationally renowned for its inclusive election environment.⁵⁷ A range of participants in the inquiry emphasised the importance of a positive voter experience. They referred to perceptions of Australian elections as featuring a

⁵⁰ See for example, Constituents in the seat of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 Kooyong campaign, *Submission 129*, p. 23; Mr Henry Moore, *Submission 206*, pp. 2–3; Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 5; Mr Paul Erickson, National Secretary, Australian Labor Party, *Committee Hansard*, 6 March 2026, pp.11–12.

⁵¹ See for example, Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 5; Name withheld, *Submission 222*, p. (2).

⁵² See for example, Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, pp. 2–3; Name withheld, *Submission 222*, p. (2); Mr Michael Maley, *Submission 174*, p. 5.

⁵³ Australian Electoral Commission, *Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce*, https://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/electoral-integrity.htm (accessed 29 June 2026).

⁵⁴ Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting First Deputy Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2025, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, AEC, and Ms Ciara Spencer, Deputy Secretary, Law Enforcement and Domestic Security, Department of Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2025, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁶ Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce, *EIAT advice to the acting Electoral Commissioner on the 2025 federal election*, 1 July 2025.

⁵⁷ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

relaxed “we’re all in it together” vibe⁵⁸, having a celebratory nature,⁵⁹ carnival atmosphere,⁶⁰ or a ‘festive atmosphere that is the envy of most nations on earth’.⁶¹ Concern was expressed that these positive characteristics may be under threat.⁶²

- 2.36 As outlined in this Chapter, there were many reports of antisocial and intimidating conduct that created a negative experience for participants in the 2025 federal election. Accounts of increased aggressive and intimidatory behaviour at pre-poll centres and polling booths were also received, including incidents of behaviour that affected voters’ participation in the election.⁶³ Multiple views were also expressed that the behaviour was intended to suppress participation in campaigning.⁶⁴
- 2.37 A submitter noted that these ‘experiences may negatively impact on citizen’s intent to participate in future election campaigns and needs addressing by law makers and enforcers’ and that this is ‘key to helping repair and maintain a strong, fit for purpose democratic infrastructure’.⁶⁵ Further evidence given at the JSCEM hearings in Ipswich supported this view.⁶⁶
- 2.38 The AEC did ‘receive reports of concern about conduct at polling places, but this was not ‘at a threshold that the EIAT would consider to be ‘interference’’.⁶⁷ The Committee noted advice that there is no specific criminal offence of domestic interference.⁶⁸

Access to the Electoral Roll

- 2.39 Section 90A of the Electoral Act requires the AEC to make a copy of the electoral roll available for public inspection at PATs for free at AEC offices at any time during office hours. While some voters have suppressed addresses due to being an eligible overseas or itinerant elector, the information that can be accessed includes surname, given names and residential address.⁶⁹ This raises potential privacy risk concerns.
- 2.40 Providing access was originally intended to assist with maintaining the integrity of the roll, including by facilitating private objections to incorrect enrolment details. The AEC noted that usage data indicates that PATs are only used to support non-residence

⁵⁸ Hon Rachel Nolan, *Submission 256*, p. (3).

⁵⁹ Democracy Matters, *Submission 236*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Constituents in the seat of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 Kooyong Campaign, *Submission 129*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Name withheld, *Submission 252*, p. 1.

⁶² See, for example, Hon Rachel Nolan, *Submission 256*, p. (3); Name withheld, *Submission 252*, p. 1.

⁶³ Mr Paul Erickson, National Secretary, Australian Labor Party, *Committee Hansard*, 6 March 2026, p. 11.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Team Electoral Reform Group, *Submission 108*, p. 4; Name withheld, *Submission 64*, p. (1); Name withheld, *Submission 71*, p. (1); Constituents in the seat of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 Kooyong campaign, *Submission 129*, p. 9; Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, pp. 3–4.

⁶⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 159*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Hon Rachel Nolan, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2025, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2025, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Ms Ciara Spencer, Deputy Secretary, Law Enforcement and Domestic Security, Department of Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2025, p. 32.

⁶⁹ AEC, *Submission 4*, pp. 6–7.

objections on a very small number of occasions. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the roll is being accessed to support debt collection, private investigations and other research such as family history and reunions. The AEC also noted that there is a risk that data may be accessed for criminal purposes.⁷⁰

- 2.41 The AEC also noted an example of a report via X 'that an activist group had made a public call for supporters to access AEC PATs to locate targets for, and then carry out, politically motivated violence'.⁷¹
- 2.42 Expectations about data management and information security, corresponding with frequent reports of significant data breaches, mean that it is now necessary to consider, as a matter of urgency, whether appropriate safeguards are in place to mitigate the risk of inappropriate access. In developing proposals for change to access policies, contrary views such as that held by the Commonwealth Ombudsman that the right of inspection conferred by section 90A is unfettered, and that stricter access policies would be inconsistent with the law,⁷² must be considered.

Committee comment

Antisocial conduct

- 2.43 Australia's electoral system is among the most robust around the world, and Australians rightly take pride in their democratic system. However, the rise of antisocial conduct threatens to diminish public trust and the assurance of safe and free elections. Aggressive conduct, deliberate obstruction, and intimidating behaviour have no place in Australian elections. Evidence received detailing allegations involving antisocial behaviour should concern all Australians.
- 2.44 The Committee finds that the 2025 federal election marked an escalation in antisocial conduct. The Committee considers that third parties, particularly newer entrants, hold significant responsibility for the substantial increase in such conduct this election. Further, their effect on the experience of electoral participants was almost universally corrosive. A strong argument can be made that conduct that would dissuade voters and volunteers participating in the electoral process could be considered as domestic interference.
- 2.45 The levels of sophisticated coordination and overzealous excess exhibited by the most brazen of these groups have the potential to erode public trust in our democracy if left unchecked. The Committee considers that a comprehensive review should be undertaken to ensure that such third parties are adequately regulated and accountable for their contributions and conduct concerning elections.
- 2.46 The Committee acknowledges the important and ongoing work of the AEC and the EIAT to ensure our elections are safe and free of interference. The challenge of

⁷⁰ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 7.

⁷¹ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 7.

⁷² AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 7.

securing our elections is an evolving one, and the Committee considers that new tools are needed to tackle emergent threats and issues.

- 2.47 The Committee is of the view that the malignant conduct seen at polling places throughout Australia during the 2025 federal election cannot be allowed to become the new normal. While federal elections have operated until 2025 without the need to codify and enforce social norms, the Committee considers that a tipping point has been reached, requiring actions to implement deliberate collective restraint and to ensure the positive, safe and respectful voter experience is maintained.
- 2.48 While many political parties have an internal code of conduct, there is now a need to formalise and expand this, given the scale of third party involvement in the 2025 federal election. Third parties generally do not have the same structure or accountability as political participants.
- 2.49 The Committee agrees that a code of conduct should apply to all election participants who attend polling booths. To ensure that the code of conduct is afforded due compliance, the Committee considers that the AEC should be empowered to act where volunteers do not adhere to its requirements.
- 2.50 The Committee recognises the need for wide ranging consultations to inform the development of the code of conduct. The Committee considers that the AEC is best placed to undertake such consultations owing to its reputation for non-partisanship and subject matter expertise.
- 2.51 The Committee regards the need to hold campaigners accountable for their conduct as crucial to preventing spread of antisocial conduct during our elections. Systems already exist to register those campaigners assisting in the scrutineering of votes, and the Committee deems it necessary to extend that system of registration to cover all campaigners attending polling locations. Processes surrounding systems of scrutineer and polling place campaigner registration, including privacy considerations, should also be reviewed and strengthened if required before implementation.
- 2.52 The Committee considers that, if the code of conduct is implemented, acceptance of the code of conduct should be a condition of registration for campaigners and scrutineers.
- 2.53 Effective implementation of the code of conduct will require that it is applied in a consistent and coordinated manner. The Committee also acknowledges that polling place officials may witness non-compliance with the code of conduct that varies in its severity, and that they should receive appropriate training to respond accordingly within the range of statutory powers open to them.
- 2.54 Having received many accounts of the intensity experienced at polling places, including intimidation and antisocial conduct, and that this was exacerbated by the six-metre exclusion zone, the Committee considers that an extended zone should be subject to regulation by the AEC.

- 2.55 While the Committee recognises that the AEC and other relevant agencies are best placed to determine design of an extended campaign zone, the measures recommended to codify appropriate conduct must be reflected, restoring a positive, safe and respectful voter experience.

Recommendation 1

- 2.56 That the Australian Electoral Commission be adequately resourced and supported to enforce any such changes outlined in the recommendations of this report.

Recommendation 2

- 2.57 The Committee recommends that the thresholds under the significant third party and associated entity frameworks be reviewed to ensure that coordinated involvement in the electoral process at scale is adequately captured.

Recommendation 3

- 2.58 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduces legislation to amend the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* to provide a statutory framework for the Australian Electoral Commissioner to make an enforceable and mandatory code of conduct for candidates, elected representatives, campaign workers, third party participants, and volunteers within and around federal polling booths.

Recommendation 4

- 2.59 The Committee recommends that, in developing the code of conduct, the Australian Electoral Commissioner be required to undertake open consultation with political participants.

Recommendation 5

- 2.60 The Committee recommends that to increase accountability of behaviour at polling places, the Australian Electoral Commissioner develop and maintain a system of registration of polling booth campaigners by candidates and third parties campaigning at polling places.

Recommendation 6

- 2.61 The Committee recommends that all candidates, elected representatives, campaign workers, third party participants, and volunteers be required to formally register their agreement to comply with the code of conduct prior to working on a polling booth.

Recommendation 7

- 2.62 The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission be granted additional statutory powers to address aggressive behaviour and misconduct at polling places, including but not limited to:**
- **issuing warnings to volunteers who breach the newly developed code of conduct**
 - **directing volunteers to leave the polling place for a defined period of time in cases involving repeated or egregious breaches of the code of conduct.**

Recommendation 8

- 2.63 The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission develops and delivers comprehensive training for senior polling place officials on enforcing the code of conduct, and on when and how to escalate responses to incidents at polling places.**

Recommendation 9

- 2.64 The Committee recommends that a new ‘campaign zone’ be created beyond the six-metre exclusion zone for each polling location in which:**
- **the code of conduct is enforced**
 - **polling place workers must be registered**
 - **the numbers of campaigners and campaign signage is to be reduced and regulated on a per candidate and per third party basis.**

Domestic interference

- 2.65** Evidence received by the Committee helps solidify the view that the Australian voting and electoral experience is second to none. It historically has been one that voters have enjoyed participating in, and is deeply rooted into the fabric of Australian culture.
- 2.66** We have witnessed, here and overseas, attempts at international influence but also interference in the electoral process, and we have agencies equipped to deal with this. However, these agencies do not have a definition for domestic interference in our electoral process.
- 2.67** Given the experiences raised by submitters about allegedly coordinated antisocial involvement by third parties leading to increased potential for Australians to be disinclined to participate in elections, the Committee considers that it is timely to review the electoral laws that protect the voter experience. This includes from deliberate interference.

Recommendation 10

- 2.68** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake a review of electoral laws with a view to protect the electoral process and voter experience from domestic interference.

Public Access Terminals

- 2.69 In their submission to the Committee, the AEC outline that the legislation requiring PATs is outdated, and poses severe privacy and security risks in the modern era.
- 2.70 It is the Committee's view, aligned with the AEC's, that given that social cohesion has eroded (this is a global phenomenon), legislation needs to urgently be amended and guidelines developed for access.

Recommendation 11

- 2.71** The Committee recommends that, due to privacy and safety risks, the Australian Government take urgent action to develop guidelines or amend such legislation as would be required to ensure that the use of public access terminals is limited to electoral purposes only and that users are known to the Electoral Commissioner.

3. Universal voter access

Introduction

- 3.1 At the 2025 federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) established 578 pre-poll booths, which took 6.84 million votes.¹ On polling day, the AEC operated 6,966 polling places that took 6.7 million ordinary votes.² This chapter examines voters' experience accessing these polling booths during the election.

Pre-poll voting

- 3.2 Pre-poll voting at the 2025 federal election commenced on Tuesday 22 April 2025, a day later than usual because of Easter Monday on 21 April 2025. There was no pre-polling on the ANZAC day public holiday on Friday 25 April 2025. Pre-poll voting closed on Friday 2 May 2025.³
- 3.3 Pre-poll voting has become increasingly popular with Australian voters.⁴ However, the Committee heard that pre-poll stations are 'frequently over-crowded with voters and volunteers blocking public footpaths and disrupting traffic', and that many of the best facilities used on election day are not available for pre-polling.⁵
- 3.4 Many inquiry participants believe that the current pre-poll period is too long, and that pre-polling should be limited to the week before polling day.⁶ On the other hand, the AEC, along with other inquiry participants, expressed a view that shortening the pre-poll period would be counterproductive considering the steady increase in voters choosing to vote during the pre-poll period. The AEC advised the Committee that a shorter pre-poll period would not decrease early voting, which continued to grow overall even when previous pre-poll periods have included public holidays, but would 'compress the growing demand into a shorter period and increase operational risks, such as queues and shortages of appropriate venues'.⁷

¹ AEC, *2025 Federal Election Report*, 2025, p. iv.

² AEC, *2025 Federal Election Report*, 2025, p. 56.

³ AEC, *2025 Federal Election Report*, 2025, p. 62.

⁴ Thomas Chick, *Submission 235*, p. (10). See also The Australia Institute, *Submission 5*, pp. 47–48; Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 7; Andrew Bartlett, *Submission 136*, p. 10; Name withheld, *Submission 252*, p. (5); Nadesan Surendran, *Submission 188*, p. (1).

⁵ Graeme Booth, *Submission 193*, pp. 2–3. See also Australian Labor Party, *Submission 322*, p. 3.

⁶ Voices of Wannon, *Submission 69*, p. 19. See also Name withheld, *Submission 91*, p. 1; Name withheld, *Submission 95*, p. (6); Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, p. 3; The Nationals, *Submission 152*, p. (1); Rebekha Sharkie, *Submission 173*, p. (3); Name withheld, *Submission 252*, p. (5).

⁷ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 17. See also Andrew Bartlett, *Submission 136*, p. 10; Mark Yore, *Submission 183*, p. 5; Name withheld, *Submission 194*, p. (2); Thomas Chick, *Supplementary Submission 235.1*, p. 9.

- 3.5 To resolve queuing due to the shortfall in appropriate venues for pre-poll voting, inquiry participants suggested that the AEC should, if needed, increase the number of staff across all booths, increase signage, and better advertise pre-poll booths.⁸ In addition, the Committee heard that pre-poll is a time when people requiring assistance tend to vote and that the venues may not be appropriately accessible, but that the increased take up of pre-poll voting is putting additional strain on the facilities.⁹
- 3.6 Inquiry participants from rural divisions, specifically Dawson and Farrer, were concerned that some pre-poll voting centres for those divisions were located outside each Division, preventing some pre-poll voters from voting in the division they live in. In Dawson, the pre-poll voting centre for the northern part of the Division was located South Townsville, just over the boundary in the Division of Herbert.¹⁰ In the Division of Farrer, four of eleven pre-poll voting centres were across the Murray River in Victoria.¹¹
- 3.7 Other inquiry participants expressed concern at the quality and suitability of locations selected to be pre-poll voting centres.¹² A submitter noted that people who require assistance make greater use of pre-poll voting centres.¹³ The locations of pre-poll voting centres tend to be less accessible than polling day polling booths. Difficulties identified include lack of appropriate parking, lack of step-free access and lack of public transport.¹⁴
- 3.8 Other concerns about pre-poll voting centres included inadequate staffing, sometimes resulting in the closure of pre-poll voting centres, and the paucity of options for people living in regional and remote areas.¹⁵
- 3.9 The evidence gathered by the Committee points to the need for the AEC to continue expanding and investing in pre-poll facilities.

Accessibility of polling booths

- 3.10 Because voting at federal elections is compulsory, the Australian Government has an obligation to enable all voters to meet their legal obligations, including people with disabilities and older Australians.¹⁶

⁸ Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, p. 3. See also Australian Labor Party, *Submission 322*, p. 3; Name withheld, *Submission 96*, p. (18).

⁹ Linda Elliot, *Submission 229*, p. (1).

¹⁰ Andrew Willcox MP, *Submission 298*, p. (1).

¹¹ Name Withheld, *Submission 219*, p. (2).

¹² Thomas Chick, *Supplementary Submission 235.1*, p. 9.

¹³ Linda Elliot, *Submission 229*, p. (1).

¹⁴ People with Disability Australia, *Submission 150*, p. 8. See also Name withheld, *Submission 96*, p. (18); Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 6; Name withheld, *Submission 65*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 96*, p. (18). See also Mark Yore, *Submission 183*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Anthony Long, *Submission 61*, p. (2). See also Ms Amy Bachrach, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 44.

- 3.11 According to the AEC, the number of accessible polling places was the highest ever for the 2025 federal election:
- During the referendum, 22 per cent of booths were fully accessible.
 - For the 2025 election, 41 per cent of booths were fully accessible, which includes wheelchair accessibility.¹⁷
- 3.12 While this is a significant improvement from previous elections, the Committee heard that this was still not quite half of the polling places at the 2025 federal election.¹⁸ Accessibility problems at polling booths were a consistent theme during the inquiry.¹⁹
- 3.13 Queuing at polling booths was the most numerous access complaint received by the Committee during the inquiry.²⁰ A number of people noted that queuing appeared to exacerbate the poor behaviour at polling booths discussed in Chapter 2 of this Report.²¹
- 3.14 Access to polling booths was another concern. For example, in relation to the Anna Bay polling place in the Division of Paterson, large access gates were closed and voters were required to use a 900 millimetre-wide gate and navigate numerous stairs or a zig-zagging ramp.²² Some polling booths had access points facing onto main roads, causing traffic congestion and risking serious accidents.²³ Further, campaigners complained that at certain polling booths, they were denied access to toilet facilities.²⁴
- 3.15 Voters who are infirm or have a disability frequently experience great difficulty accessing and voting in polling booths,²⁵ including:
- people with a sight impairment who are unable to access read aloud pens²⁶
 - people with mobility issues who are unable to access appropriate parking or encounter difficulties on their way into a polling booth²⁷

¹⁷ Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 8.

¹⁸ The Greens, *Submission 118*, p. 10.

¹⁹ Ms Leonie Bird, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, pp. 39–40. See also Mr Robert Edgar, *Committee Hansard*, 19 November 2025, p. 14.

²⁰ Richard Ure, *Submission 8*, p. (2); See also Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, p. 3; Phillip Stott, *Submission 78*, p. (1); Leslie Ross, *Submission 317*, p. (1); Name withheld, *Submission 194*, p. (2); Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 6; Name withheld, *Submission 252*, p. (6).

²¹ Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, p. 3. See also Ms Alison Mansell, *Committee Hansard*, 19 November 2026, p. 19.

²² Name withheld, *Submission 25*, p. (1).

²³ Narooma Branch, *Submission 41*, p. (2). See also Name withheld, *Submission 95*, p. (12); Name withheld, *Submission 96*, p. (17); Voices of Wannon, *Submission 69*, p.14; Richard Ure, *Submission 8*, p. (1); Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 6.

²⁴ Name withheld, *Submission 38*, p. (1). See also: Kooyong Volunteers, *Submission 129*, p.15; Damien Hurrell, *Submission 158*, p. (2); Witness 6, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2026, p. 32.

²⁵ Witness 6, *Committee Hansard*, 11 December 2026, p. 32.

²⁶ Name withheld, *Submission 19*, p. (1).

²⁷ People with Disability Australia, *Submission 150*, p. 8; see also Name withheld, *Submission 96*, p. (18); Name withheld, *Submission 95*, p. (3); Name withheld, *Submission 272*, p. (1).

- people with sensory or psychological impairment, who experience trouble with queuing, noise, and the attention of campaigners.²⁸

3.16 Examples include:

- a candidate noted the difficulty voters using walking frames had accessing a polling booth²⁹
- elderly voters at another polling booth seen ‘hobbling long distances to reach the voting booth’³⁰
- people with sensory needs finding polling places overwhelming, a situation exacerbated by the increasingly confrontational atmosphere at polling booths.³¹

3.17 The Committee heard about examples of shopping centres, supermarkets and theatres that accommodate people with sensory needs as examples the AEC could emulate.³²

3.18 While the AEC has an excellent record of increasing the number of polling booths with better access and facilities, the ageing Australian population means there is going to be increasing demand for these types of polling booths.

3.19 The Committee is of the view that the AEC should put more emphasis on selecting appropriate polling booths and training Officers in Charge of polling booths to make best use of the available facilities for the voters’ convenience.

Committee comment

3.20 The Committee is of the view that Australian voters are clearly expressing a preference for an extended voting period. This preference appears to have evolved organically, without encouragement, as people move to vote when it fits their schedules.

3.21 While the Committee notes that many of those involved in federal elections would prefer pre-polling to be available for a shorter period and only to voters who legitimately cannot vote on polling day, the most important stakeholder in an election is the constituency of voters, and they appear to have made up their minds.

3.22 A significant amount of evidence received by the Committee pertained to aggressive conduct during the pre-poll period, due to limited pre-polling locations, high numbers of people in attendance and the length of time that pre-polling locations are open for. These factors may contribute to escalating tensions.

²⁸ People with Disability Australia, *Submission 150*, p. 8. See also Name withheld, *Submission 65*, p. 3; Linda Elliot, *Submission 229*, p. (1); Yaron Gottlieb, *Submission 104*, p. (2).

²⁹ Name withheld, *Submission 63*, p. 3. See also Name withheld, *Submission 96*, p. 17.

³⁰ Ms Stella Yee, *Submission 255*, p. (2).

³¹ Mr Matthew Hayes, *Committee Hansard*, 20 November 2025, p. 25.

³² Mr Matthew Hayes, *Committee Hansard*, 20 November 2025, pp. 26–27.

- 3.23 Bearing this in mind, the Committee considers that, in order to meet the increasing number of pre-poll voters, the AEC reviews the resourcing requirements, number of pre-polling booths per electorate, and duration of pre-poll voting.

Recommendation 12

- 3.24 The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission reviews the resourcing requirements and duration of pre-poll voting to ensure adequate arrangements are in place, noting the increasing numbers of electors voting by ordinary pre-poll and the need to ensure the safety and quality of the voter experience.**
- 3.25 The Committee is of the strong view that everything should be done to assist voters who wish to vote at a polling booth, regardless of any condition that might discourage them from doing so.
- 3.26 To this end, the Committee considers that the AEC set itself a goal to ensure that the majority of polling booths in each electorate are accessible, provides step free access, appropriate toilet facilities for public use, and clearly marked accessible parking.

Recommendation 13

- 3.27 The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission sets the goal of ensuring that the majority of polling places in each electorate are physically accessible, provide step-free access for mobility assistance devices, have sufficient toilet facilities available for public use, and have sufficient and clearly marked accessible parking bays close to the entrance.**



4. Authorisation framework suitability

Introduction

- 4.1 Free and fair elections rely on a voter's ability to assess the veracity of political communications about candidates and policies. To enable this at federal elections, political communications must contain the identity and address of the person or entity responsible for the communication (referred to as an 'authorisation'),¹ which enables 'voters to know the source of communications that could influence their voting decisions during a federal election'.²
- 4.2 Evidence gathered by the Committee exposed an increasing lack of transparency and accountability in the authorisation of political communications, particularly around:
- who is paying for political communications
 - the correct contact information for the person or entity responsible for the political communications
 - accountability for failure to either authorise or correctly authorise political communications
 - the capacity of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to enforce authorisation requirements, including political communications distributed on social media and generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Authorisation

- 4.3 Evidence presented to the Committee during the inquiry discussed a number of concerns about the authorisation of electoral material, including complaints made to the AEC about material that had incorrect authorisation requirements, which continued to circulate well after the complaint was made.³ In addition, the Committee

¹ The current authorisation requirements are set out in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, Part XXA, Division 2.

² AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 10. See also Graeme Booth, *Submission 193*, p. 3.

³ Allegra Spender MP, *Submission 231*, p. (2). See also Voices of Bean, *Submission 212*, p. 3; Ms Sussan Hely, *Committee Hansard*, 20 November 2025, p. 20.

heard evidence about a lack of clarity concerning third parties,⁴ and the sharp increase in the use of social media and AI for political communications.⁵

Third parties

- 4.4 Third parties include all entities engaged in political communication that are not candidates or political parties and are involved in both physical and online campaigning. Third parties have become a significant participant in political communication,⁶ largely without the awareness of voters.⁷ The AEC noted that they saw ‘some issue-motivated groups who didn’t have a candidate in the election but who wanted to promote their particular cause for an aligned party or an aligned candidate, or potentially even just for media attention’.⁸
- 4.5 Third parties themselves reported a lack of clarity around their authorisation obligations, including relating to when a third party political communication required authorisation,⁹ the type of organisation that fell within the definition of a third party,¹⁰ and what detail was required in a third party authorisation.¹¹
- 4.6 Inquiry participants wanted to see greater transparency around third parties, including details of their structure and any political affiliations. Other inquiry participants recommended that third party organisations should all be registered, regardless of the level of expenditure.¹²

Social media

- 4.7 Social media¹³ has significantly diversified the types and sources of political communication, and requires clarity in terms of authorisation requirements.¹⁴

⁴ Ripple Legal, *Submission 164*, p. (1). See also Lighter Footprints, *Submission 62*, p. (1); Advance Australia, *Submission 148*, p. (2); Name withheld, *Submission 342*, p. (2); Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2024, p. 19; Climate 200, *Submission 149*, p. 12.

⁵ Dr Fan Yang, Research Lead, RECapture, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 18. See also Dr Sarah Moulds, Committee Member, Democracy 2036, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 9; Professor Rodrigo Priano, *Committee Hansard*, 4 May 2026, p. 15; Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 7; Liberal Party of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. (2).

⁶ Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 3.

⁷ Constituents of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 campaign, *Submission 129*, p. 25.

⁸ Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 3.

⁹ Climate 200, *Submission 149*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 342*, p. (2).

¹¹ Ripple Legal, *Submission 164*, p. (1). See also Lighter Footprints, *Submission 62*, p. (1); Advance Australia, *Submission 148*, p. (2).

¹² Name withheld, *Submission 180*, p. 3. See also Constituents of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 campaign, *Submission 129*, p. 27.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of social media and political communication, see Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, *Submission 195*.

¹⁴ Dr Fan Yang, Research Lead, RECapture, *Committee Hansard*, 12 November 2025, p. 18.

- 4.8 The Committee heard that social media political communication encompasses a wide range of platforms and channels, including short video services, influencers and podcasts.¹⁵
- 4.9 The AEC reported that during the 2025 federal election they reviewed 2,736 social media communications and identified 1,020 breaches of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act).¹⁶
- 4.10 In relation to authorisation, a social media based political communication can be posted by one person or entity, then reposted by other persons or entities many times over. Identifying the authorisation obligations of these various political communications is, according to the AEC, a real challenge.¹⁷
- 4.11 In addition, obtaining the cooperation of social media organisations for regulatory action during a federal election can be difficult, particularly when they are based overseas and are beyond the jurisdiction of Australian electoral law.¹⁸ This problem is exacerbated when the social media organisation uses a foreign language.¹⁹
- 4.12 The Committee heard that a number of challenges to regulating political communication authorisation obligations on social media exist, including establishing regulatory authorities that are fit-for-purpose and have sufficient powers and resources to regulate within the complexity of social media.²⁰
- 4.13 Other inquiry participants suggested the AEC should have the power to swiftly issue take down notices, require corrections, and geoblock unauthorised or misleading online political communication.²¹

Artificial Intelligence

- 4.14 The range of political communication made by AI includes individually directed communication, deepfakes of election participants, and AI automated social media accounts.²²

¹⁵ RECapture Research, *Submission 34*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Ms Rachel Houghton, Chief Legal Officer, Australian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 10.

¹⁷ Mr Andrew Johnson, Chief Legal Officer, Australian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 9.

¹⁸ AEC, *Submission 4*, pp. 8–9.

¹⁹ AEC, *Submission 4*, p. 8.

²⁰ Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, *Submission 195*, pp. 13–14.

²¹ Andrew Bartlett, *Committee Hansard*, 10 December 2025, p. 22. See also Australian Democracy Network, *Submission 131*, p. (3); Name withheld, *Submission 287*, p. (16).

²² Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 9. See also Accountability Round Table, *Submission 343*, p. 17; Senator David Pocock, *Submission 246*, p. 4; Climate 200, *Submission 149*, p. 12; Australian Association of Voice Actors, *Submission 147*, p. 2; Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, p. 5.

- 4.15 The Committee received evidence that ‘without clear standards of authenticity, disclosure, and accountability, AI generated disinformation risks distorting voter perceptions on a scale and with a speed previously unimaginable’.²³
- 4.16 The AEC does not have power to regulate or ban AI generated political communication, but does advise voters to exercise discretion when considering the veracity of AI produced material.²⁴
- 4.17 The Committee was encouraged to take action on AI political communication before the next federal election, by which time it is expected to become a ubiquitous campaigning tool and source of information for voters.²⁵
- 4.18 Suggestions from inquiry participants broadly fell into two camps, those who supported the extension of authorisation requirements to explicitly cover political communication which uses AI as a tool, or AI to generate the electoral matter,²⁶ and those who believe AI should be banned from use for political campaigning altogether.²⁷
- 4.19 The Committee intends to gather more evidence on this issue and make a recommendation on the use of AI in its final report.

Committee comment

- 4.20 Many inquiry participants suggested some improvements to the authorisation obligations, including that authorisation details be consistent across all electoral matter regardless of source,²⁸ and authorisation requirements should apply at all times rather than just during the election period.²⁹
- 4.21 Other inquiry participants supported a comprehensive overhaul of the authorisation obligations to ensure they fulfill their fundamental purpose.³⁰
- 4.22 The Committee is of the view that significant changes are required to the way political communications are authorised and regulated at federal elections.

²³ Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, *Submission 195*, pp. 8–9. See also Global Shield, *Submission 83*, p. 6.

²⁴ Australian Association of Voice Actors, *Submission 147*, p. 2.

²⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 68*, p. 1. See also Climate 200, *Submission 149*, p. 12.

²⁶ Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2024, p. 19. See also Transparency International, *Submission 196*, p. (4); Liberal Party of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. (2); Mark Yore, *Submission 183*, p. 7; Name withheld, *Submission 91*, p. 2; Australian Association of Voice Actors, *Submission 147*, p. 3; Ripple Legal, *Submission 164*, p. (4); Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 10; Anthony Long, *Submission 61*, p. (2); Mr Devon Whittle, Australian Director, Global Shield Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2025, p. 1.

²⁷ Name withheld, *Submission 252*, p. (8). See also Global Shield, *Submission 83*, p. 6; Accountability Round Table, *Submission 343*, p. 3; Climate 200, *Submission 149*, p. 12; Name withheld, *Submission 96*, p. (16); Senator David Pocock, *Committee Hansard*, 27 March 2026, p. 28.

²⁸ Voices of Deakin, *Submission 209*, p. 8.

²⁹ Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2025, p. 17. See also Voices of Fisher, *Submission 126*, p. 5.

³⁰ Ripple Legal, *Submission 164*, p. (2). See also Accountability Round Table, *Submission 343*, p. 5.

- 4.23 The current authorisation provisions are not sufficient to meet the needs of modern elections. In particular, the authorisation provisions are essentially a patchwork of changes to the Electoral Act reflecting the changing nature of political communications over time. They vary a great deal depending on a range of factors, and they are not sufficient to ensure transparency of online political communications.
- 4.24 In addition, the Committee is concerned that the AEC does not have the authority to act on political communications that are either not authorised, incorrectly authorised, or misleading in a timely manner, especially if the AEC needs to obtain a court order in the face of non-compliance. The Committee is of the view that the AEC should be given the power to act to remove offending political communications at the time it deems them to be so, with the authoriser of the communication being entitled to seek a court order overturning the AEC's decision.

Recommendation 14

- 4.25 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduces legislation to amend the authorisation framework and requirements for electoral matter under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* to ensure:**
- **voters know who communications come from, including who is paying for communications if it is not the person or entity authorising the communications**
 - **communications are traceable to facilitate enforcement, including where a person or entity does not have a regular physical presence at the address listed in an authorisation**
 - **those participating in public debate are accountable for their communications, including where material is distributed without reasonable endeavours to comply with authorisation rules**
 - **that the AEC is empowered to enforce authorisation requirements including removal or blocking of non-compliant material, both physical and online.**

Mr Jerome Laxale MP
Chair



A. Submissions

- 1 The Honourable Bob McMullan
- 2 Dr Jill Sheppard
- 3 Grattan Institute
 - 3.1 Supplementary to submission 3
- 4 Australian Electoral Commission
 - 4.1 Supplementary to submission 4
 - 4.2 Supplementary to submission 4
 - 4.3 Supplementary to submission 4
- 5 The Australia Institute
 - 5.1 Supplementary to submission 5
 - 5.2 Supplementary to submission 5
- 6 Andrew Murray
- 7 Ms Genevieve Grant
- 8 Mr Richard Ure
- 9 Mr Barry Searle
- 10 *Name Withheld*
- 11 Mr Bruce Waddell
- 12 Dr Matthew Jennings
- 13 Lex Stewart
- 14 Monica Sammon
- 15 *Name Withheld*
- 16 *Name Withheld*
- 17 *Name Withheld*

- 18 Mr Jerry Gek
- 19 *Name Withheld*
- 20 *Name Withheld*
- 21 *Name Withheld*
- 22 *Name Withheld*
- 23 *Name Withheld*
- 24 *Name Withheld*
- 25 *Name Withheld*
- 26 *Name Withheld*
- 27 Ronald Ruys
- 28 Leonora Ritter
- 29 Ms Naomi Oakley
- 30 Brendan Kelly
- 31 *Name Withheld*
- 32 *Name Withheld*
- 33 *Name Withheld*
- 34 RECapture Research Lab
- 35 *Name Withheld*
- 36 *Name Withheld*
- 37 Ms Faye Clark
- 38 Ross Hannah
- 39 Mr Ray Peck
- 40 Ms Cecilia Hannon
- 41 Narooma Branch
- 42 *Name Withheld*
- 43 Ms Marilyn Beaumont OAM

- 44 Kyneton Party Branch
- 45 Mr Michael Doyle
- 45.1 Supplementary to submission 45
- 46 Confidential
- 47 *Name Withheld*
- 48 Mr Greg Twitt
- 49 *Name Withheld*
- 50 Mr Thomas Sesselmann
- 51 Travis Jordan
- Attachment 1
- 52 John Ferguson
- 53 *Name Withheld*
- 54 Beryl Marquette
- 55 Ms Catherine Duloy
- 56 *Name Withheld*
- 57 Mr Tony Robinson
- 58 Confidential
- 59 Ben Raue
- 60 *Name Withheld*
- 61 Mr Anthony Long
- 62 Lighter Footprints Inc.
- 63 *Name Withheld*
- 64 *Name Withheld*
- 65 *Name Withheld*
- 66 Jerrabomberra Residents Association
- 67 *Name Withheld*

- 68** *Name Withheld*
- 69** Voices of Wannon
- 70** Confidential
- 71** *Name Withheld*
- 72** Lynn Lawson
- 73** *Name Withheld*
- 74** *Name Withheld*
- 75** Mr Nikolaos Fouras
- 76** Penny Newlove
- 77** *Name Withheld*
- 78** Philip Stott
- 79** Jane Johnson
- 80** Sandra Hand
- 81** *Name Withheld*
- 82** Blue Mountains Union Council Inc
- 83** Global Shield Australia
- 83.1 Supplementary to submission 83
- 84** *Name Withheld*
- 85** Dr Nick Abel
- 86** Mr Brian Coughlan
- 87** Mr John Sherwood
- 88** Confidential
- 89** Foundations for Tomorrow
- 90** Mr Prabha Kutty
- 91** *Name Withheld*
- 92** Professor Kim Rubenstein

- 93** *Name Withheld*
- 94** Chris Dahlitz
- 95** *Name Withheld*
- 96** *Name Withheld*
- 97** *Name Withheld*
- 98** Erik Jochimsen
- Attachment 1
 - Attachment 2
- 99** Jeff Waddell
- 100** *Name Withheld*
- 101** *Name Withheld*
- 102** Confidential
- 103** *Name Withheld*
- 104** Mr Yaron Gottlieb
- 104.1 Supplementary to submission 104
- 105** Ms Heather Ogilvie
- 106** *Name Withheld*
- 107** *Name Withheld*
- 108** Team Electoral Reform Group
- 109** Mrs Joanne Foreman
- 110** 4 Year Terms Australia
- 110.1 Supplementary to submission 110
- 111** *Name Withheld*
- 112** Mr Bram Alexander
- 113** Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy
- 114** Mr Bernie Ross
- 115** *Name Withheld*

- 116** *Name Withheld*
- 117** Dr Debora Campbell
- 118** Australian Greens
- 119** *Name Withheld*
- 120** McKinnon
- 121** Thomas Stephen
- 122** *Name Withheld*
- 123** Jim Towers
- 124** Mr Oliver Baitch
- 125** *Name Withheld*
- 126** Voices of Fisher
- 127** *Name Withheld*
- 128** Leonie Bird
- 128.1 Supplementary to submission 128
- 129** Constituents in the seat of Kooyong who volunteered for the 2025 Kooyong campaign
- 130** Stronger Charities Alliance
- 131** Australian Democracy Network
- 132** *Name Withheld*
- 133** Margaret Callinan
- 134** Lung Foundation Australia
- 135** Human Rights Law Centre
- 136** Mr Andrew Bartlett
- 137** Jim Pearce
- 138** *Name Withheld*
- 139** Mr Matthew Hayes

- 140** Alison Mansell
- 141** Malcolm Mackerras
- Attachment 1
- 142** *Name Withheld*
- 143** Jeremy Graham
- 144** Bob Edgar
- 145** *Name Withheld*
- 146** Mr Chek Ling
- 146.1 Supplementary to submission 146
- 147** The Australian Association of Voice Actors
- 148** Advance Australia
- 148.1 Supplementary to submission 148
- 149** Climate 200
- 150** People with Disability Australia
- 151** Public Health Association of Australia
- 152** National Party of Australia
- 153** National Party of Australia, Victoria
- 154** Law Council of Australia
- 155** Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
- 156** Liberal Party of Australia
- 157** Institute of Public Affairs
- 158** Mr Damien Hurrell
- 159** *Name Withheld*
- 160** Ms Judy Cameron
- 161** Geoff Robin
- 162** The Real Republic Australia

- 163** The Hon Kelvin Thompson
- 164** Ripple Legal
- 165** Confidential
- 166** Mr John Holland
- 167** *Name Withheld*
- 168** Dr Rob Manwaring, Dr Emily Foley, Dr Narelle Miragliotta, Dr Josh Holloway
- 169** Dr Robert Bell
- 170** Louise Fagan
- 171** *Name Withheld*
- 172** Mr James Smith
- 173** Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP
- 174** Mr Michael Maley
- 175** Mr Allen Hampton
- 175.1 Supplementary to submission 175
- 176** Chris Curtis
- 177** *Name Withheld*
- 178** Centre for Public Integrity
- 179** David Robertson
- 180** *Name Withheld*
- 181** *Name Withheld*
- 182** Mr Albert Agnello
- 183** Mr Mark Yore
- 183.1 Supplementary to submission 183
 - 183.2 Supplementary to submission 183
- 184** Robert Kimpton
- 185** *Name Withheld*

- 186** Confidential
- 187** Confidential
- 188** Mr Nadesan Surendran
- 189** Nick Toovey
- 190** Mr. Ethan du Toit
- 191** *Name Withheld*
- 192** *Name Withheld*
- 193** Mr Graeme Booth
- 194** *Name Withheld*
- 195** Professor Joo-Cheong Tham
- 196** Transparency International Australia
- 197** *Name Withheld*
- 198** Ms Rosemary Kelly
- 199** *Name Withheld*
- 200** Ms Lori Callahan
- 201** *Name Withheld*
- 202** *Name Withheld*
- 203** *Name Withheld*
- 204** Ms Robin Low
- 205** *Name Withheld*
- 206** Mr Henry Moore
- 207** Confidential
- 208** Confidential
- 209** Voices of Deakin
- 210** *Name Withheld*
- 211** *Name Withheld*

- 212** Voices of Bean
- 213** William George Cole MBA
- 214** Ms Leah Stacpoole
- 215** Michael Buining
- 216** Mr Simon Cox
- 217** Bob Holderness-Roddam
- 218** Vision Australia
- 219** *Name Withheld*
- 220** David Bascomb
- 221** *Name Withheld*
- 222** *Name Withheld*
- 223** Stephanie Dahlsen
- 224** Anastasia Redlich
- 225** *Name Withheld*
- 226** Wyong Labor Branch
- 227** Confidential
- 228** *Name Withheld*
- 229** Ms Linda Elliott
- 230** Diana Yallop
- 231** Allegra Spender MP
- 232** Chris Lynch
- 233** A/Prof Vanessa Teague
- 234** *Name Withheld*
- 235** Mr Thomas Chick
- 235.1 Supplementary to submission 235
- 236** Democracy Matters

- 237** Microsoft
- 238** Rationalist Society of Australia
- 239** Stephen Swift
- 240** Confidential
- 241** Antony Green
- 242** *Name Withheld*
- 243** Dr Kevin Bonham
- 244** Mr Mark Rice
- 245** *Name Withheld*
- 246** Senator David Pocock
- 247** Ms Kate Chaney MP
- 248** Malcolm Baalman
- 248.1 Supplementary to submission 248
- 249** *Name Withheld*
- 250** Mr Cillín Perera
- 251** Mrs Sally Woodward
- 252** *Name Withheld*
- 253** Arthur Needham
- 254** Confidential
- 255** Ms Stella Yee
- 256** Hon Rachel Nolan
- 257** Confidential
- 258** Associate Professor Paul Williams
- 259** Plymouth Brethren Christian Church
- 260** Chris Warwick
- 261** Proportional Representation Society of Australia

- 262 Queen's Run Consulting
- 263 Mr Troy Harper
- 264 Robert Kerby
- 265 *Name Withheld*
- 266 Graham Cooke
- 267 Mr Troy Nicholson
- 268 Mr Tony Fairweather
- 269 *Name Withheld*
- 270 Michael Butterworth
- 271 Geoff Grimes
- 272 *Name Withheld*
- 273 Peter Rickards
- 274 *Name Withheld*
- 275 *Name Withheld*
- 276 *Name Withheld*
- 277 *Name Withheld*
- 278 Confidential
- 279 Confidential
- 280 *Name Withheld*
- 281 Mr Geoffrey Gilbert
- 282 Rob Davies
- 283 Electoral Reform Society of SA
- 284 Philip Lillingston
- 285 *Name Withheld*
- 286 *Name Withheld*
- 287 *Name Withheld*

- 288** Dr Vered Schildkraut
- 289** Ray Tunstall
- 290** Confidential
- 291** Ray Carter
- 291.1 Supplementary to submission 291
- 292** *Name Withheld*
- 293** *Name Withheld*
- 294** Confidential
- 295** Heather Reid et al
- 296** Confidential
- 297** DemocracyCo
- 298** Andrew Willcox MP
- 299** Mr Tom Zayontz
- 300** *Name Withheld*
- 301** Belinda Jones
- 302** *Name Withheld*
- 303** *Name Withheld*
- 304** David Reid
- 305** Ms Louise Miller-Frost
- 306** Mrs Julie Croasdale
- 307** Nathan Wright
- 307.1 Supplementary to submission 307
 - 307.2 Supplementary to submission 307
- 308** *Name Withheld*
- 309** Alan Brudenell
- 310** *Name Withheld*

- 311 *Name Withheld*
- 312 Robin Boyd
- 313 Andy Hornbuckle
- 314 *Name Withheld*
- 315 Mr Conrad Liveris
- 316 *Name Withheld*
- 317 Mr Leslie Ross
- 318 Really Local
- 319 *Name Withheld*
- 320 *Name Withheld*
- 321 Mr Lachlan Poel
- 322 Australian Labor Party
- 323 *Name Withheld*
- 324 Mary Aldred MP
- 325 *Name Withheld*
- 326 *Name Withheld*
- 327 Mr Timothy Liersch
- 328 Mr Harvey Weeks
- 329 *Name Withheld*
- 330 *Name Withheld*
- 331 Don Ayres
- 332 *Name Withheld*
- 333 *Name Withheld*
- 334 Mr Jake Rassack
- 335 *Name Withheld*
- 336 June Love

- 337** Dr Joe Flood and Marilla North
- 338** Steven Scott
- 339** *Name Withheld*
- 340** Council of State Retirees' Associations Inc. (COSRAV)
- 341** *Name Withheld*
- 342** *Name Withheld*
- 343** Accountability Round Table
- 344** Miss Verity Greenleaf
- 345** Mr Paul Harman
- 346** Philip Connole
- 347** Zali Steggall OAM MP
- 348** Leon Rebello MP
- 349** Ms Fiona Roberts
- 350** Confidential
- 351** *Name Withheld*
- 352** Anonymous Former Plymouth Brethren Christian Church Members
- 353** *Name Withheld*
- 354** Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
- 355** Ms Kaye Swanton
- 356** Jocene Wheatley
- 357** Free TV
- 358** Tristan Cockman
- 359** Austin Trump, Tristan Cockman, Shane Cuthbert
- 360** *Name Withheld*



B. Public hearings

Wednesday 15 October 2025

Committee Room 2R1

Parliament House

Canberra

Australian Electoral Commission

- Mr Jeff Pope, Acting Electoral Commissioner
- Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner
- Ms Rachael Spalding, First Assistant Commissioner, Enabling and Regulation Group
- Ms Rachel Houghton, Chief Operating Officer
- Mr Andrew Johnson, Chief Legal Officer

The Honourable Bob McMullan, Private capacity

Dr Jill Sheppard

The Australia Institute

- Mr William Browne, Director, Democracy and Accountability Program
- Ms Skye Predavec, Researcher

Grattan Institute

- Dr Aruna Sathanapally, Chief Executive Officer and Program Director, Economic Prosperity and Democracy
- Ms Kate Griffiths, Democracy Deputy Program Director

Professor Emerita Anne Twomey, Private capacity

Friday 31 October 2025

Committee Room 1R4

Parliament House

Canberra

Global Shield Australia

- Mr Devon Whittle, Australia Director
- Mr Rumtin Sepasspour, Director, Policy and Strategy

Professor Kim Rubenstein, Private capacity

Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce

- Ms Lucinda Atkinson, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance
- Mr David Belgrove, Assistant Secretary, Government Division, Parliament, Government and Honours Branch, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Mr David Chick, Assistant Secretary, Counter Foreign Interference Policy and Coordination, Department of Home Affairs
- Ms Kath Gleeson, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission
- Ms Julie Heckscher, First Assistant Secretary, Regulatory and Legal Policy Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Mr Andrew Johnson, Chief Legal Officer, Australian Electoral Commission
- Mr Michael Lynch, First Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Integrity and Operations Group, Australian Electoral Commission
- Mr Alan Marjan, First Assistant Director-General, Cyber Threat Intelligence, Australian Signals Directorate
- Lieutenant General Michelle McGuinness, National Cyber Security Coordinator, Department of Home Affairs
- Ms Susan McKeag, Assistant Secretary, Transparency Frameworks Branch, Attorney-General's Department
- Mr Michael Noyes, Deputy Director-General, Intelligence Service Delivery, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
- Mr Stuart Oreo, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Integrity and Media Branch, Australian Electoral Commission
- Mr Nigel Ryan, Acting Deputy Commissioner, National Security, Australian Federal Police
- Ms Ciara Spencer, Deputy Secretary, Law Enforcement and Domestic Security, Department of Home Affairs

- Mr John Swieringa, First Assistant Director-General, Office of National Intelligence
- Mr Antony Urwin, Assistant Director-General, National Partnerships, Australian Signals Directorate
- Ms Sarah Vandebroek, First Assistant Secretary, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication, Sport and the Arts
- Mr Joshua Wood, Assistant Director, Electoral Policy, Grants and Governance Division, Department of Finance

Friday 7 November 2025

Committee Room 2R1

Parliament House

Canberra

Dr Kevin Bonham, Private capacity

4 Year Terms Australia

- Mr Marty Gray, Founder

The Tally Room

- Mr Ben Raue, Electoral Analyst

Australian Greens

- Mr Jonathan Parry, Deputy Convenor

Roundtable of Independent Members and Senators

- Ms Nicolette Boele MP, Member for Bradfield
- Ms Kate Chaney MP, Member for Curtin
- Dr Helen Haines MP, Member for Indi
- Ms Dai Le MP, Member for Fowler
- Senator David Pocock, Senator for Australian Capital Territory
- Dr Sophie Scamps MP, Member for Mackellar
- Ms Zali Steggall MP, OAM, Member for Warringah

Wednesday 12 November 2025

Just Theatre

Kew Court House

188 High Street

Kew

ReCapture Labs

- Dr Robbie Fordyce, Research Lead
- Dr Luke Heemsbergen, Research Lead
- Dr Fan Yang, Research Lead

Community sessions

- Ms Amy Bachrach
- Susan Barrett, Volunteer Trainer and Volunteer, Team Zoe - Volunteer Team for Zoe Daniel's 2025 Campaign
- Ms Leonie Bird
- Ms Jenny 'Yanli' Chin
- Mr Brian Coughlan
- Mr Simon Cox
- Mr Arkin Daniel-Reid
- Ms Rosanne Gibb
- Mr Yaron Gottlieb
- Mr Michael Groves
- Dr Shirley Leitch
- Mr Rodney Moran
- Professor Steve Selig
- Mr Tony Stephen
- Mr Carlo Toncich
- Mr Tim Wade, Volunteers for the 2025 Kooyong Independent campaign

Wednesday 19 November 2025

Berkeley Community Centre

40 Winnima Way

Dapto

Ms Carol Berry MP, Member for Whitlam

Mr James Pearce, Private capacity

Community sessions

- Mr Matthew Brown
- Mr Robert Edgar
- Mr Jeremy Graham
- Mr Ross Hannah
- Mrs Alison Mansell
- Ms Penelope Newlove
- Ms Ailis Quinn
- Mr Simon Vanderzeil

Thursday 20 November 2025

Gold and Silver Room

Mantra Parramatta

Crn Parkes Street and Valentine Aveune

Parramatta

Professor Rodney Smith, Private capacity

Australian Labor Party (NSW Branch)

- Mr George Simon, Assistant General Secretary, New South Wales Branch

Dr Luke Mansillo, Private capacity

Community sessions

- Ms Sue Bolton
- Ms Catherine Duloy
- Mr John Few
- Mr Matthew Hayes

- Ms Susan Hely
- Mr Alex Hemmer
- Dr Graham Robertson

Wednesday 10 December 2025

Chancellor 1, 2 and 3

Grand Chancellor Hotel

23 Leichhardt Street

Spring Hill

Brisbane

Associate Professor Paul Williams, Private capacity

Mr Travis Jordan, Private capacity

Foundations for Tomorrow

- Ms Emi Hall, Director, Operations

Mr Andrew Bartlett, Private capacity

Professor Graeme Orr, Private capacity

Community sessions

- Mrs Merryl Bartley
- Mrs Joanne Foreman
- Mr Chek Ling
- Mrs Pamela Rose
- Ms Carmel Tiley

Thursday 11 December 2025

Room 2

North Ipswich Reserve Centre

43 The Terrace

North Ipswich

Professor John Cole OAM, Private capacity

Honourable Rachel Nolan, Private capacity

Adjunct Associate Professor the Hon John Mickel, Private capacity

Community sessions

- Ms Cassandra Barrett
- Mr Arthur Needham
- Madonna
- Mr Christopher Warwick
- Witness 4
- Witness 6
- Witness 7

Friday 6 March 2026

Committee Room 1R4

Parliament House

Canberra

Climate 200

- Mr Simon Holmes a Court, Convenor
- Ms Alexandria Rantino, Head of Legal

Australian Labor Party

- Mr Paul Erickson, National Secretary

Friday 27 March 2026

Committee Room 2R1

Parliament House

Canberra

Mr Benjamin Woodbury, Private capacity (via video conference)

Mrs Cassandra Davies, Private capacity (via video conference)

Independents Roundtable

- Ms Nicolette Boele MP, Member for Bradfield
- Ms Dai Le MP, Member for Fowler
- Senator David Pocock, Senator for the Australian Capital Territory
- Dr Sophie Scamps MP, Member for Mackellar

Monday 4 May 2026

Hindley Room 3

Hotel Grand Chancellor

65 Hindley Street

Adelaide

Democracy 2036

- Dr Sarah Moulds, Committee Member

Professor Rodrigo Praino

Mr Lachlan Poel, Private capacity

Electoral Reform Society of South Australia

- Mr William Spragg, President

Umeewarra Aboriginal Media Association

- Ms Gayle Mather, Producer and Manager (via audio link)

Community Sessions

- Dr Victoria Fielding
- Ms Helen Schutz
- Ms Joanna Wells

Tuesday 5 May 2026

Hindley Room 3

Hotel Grand Chancellor

65 Hindley Street

Adelaide

Electoral Commission of South Australia

- Ms Leah McLay, Acting Electoral Commissioner
- Mr Daniel Moriarty, Manager, Compliance

C. Election timeline

A timeline of election milestones for the 2025 Federal Election is set out in Table C.1 below.

Table C.1 Election Timeline

Milestone	Date
Announcement of election and opening of postal vote applications	Friday, 28 March 2025
Issue of writs	Monday, 31 March 2025
Close of rolls	Monday, 7 April 2025
Close of candidate bulk nominations for the House of Representatives	Tuesday, 8 April 2025
Close of candidate nominations	Thursday, 10 April 2025
Declaration of nominations and candidate order draw	Friday, 11 April 2025
Commencement of mobile and pre-poll voting	Tuesday, 22 April 2025
Last day for receipt of postal vote applications	Wednesday, 30 April 2025
Election day	Saturday, 3 May 2025
Last day for receipt of postal votes	Friday, 16 May 2025
Return of writs	Thursday, 12 June 2025

Source: Australian Electoral Commission, 2025, *2025 Federal Election Report*, https://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/federal_elections/2025/2025-Federal-Election-Report.pdf.



Additional comments by Monique Ryan MP

- 1.1 I thank the Committee for its work on this matter.
- 1.2 I also thank the many hundreds of individuals and groups that made written submissions to or appeared before the Committee. It was clear that many had found engagement in the 2025 federal election challenging, even traumatic. Their ongoing and generous commitment to our electoral processes were a testament to the strength of Australia's democracy.
- 1.3 While I support the Committee's work to date, I am concerned that the interim report does not yet address a number of matters within the Inquiry's terms of reference. I set these out below, together with specific concerns or comments regarding recommendations of the Inquiry and additional recommendations of my own.

Electoral donation and expenditure reform

- 1.4 The terms of reference expressly ask the Committee to consider the implementation and operation of the electoral reforms passed by the 47th Parliament, particularly regarding the use of money or capital in the 2025 federal election. The interim report does not engage with this matter, despite its direct relevance to the conduct of the election under review.
- 1.5 These donation and expenditure changes will likely have a chilling effect on small parties, independents and, in particular, new candidates. Spending and donation caps set without regard to incumbency advantage will tend to entrench sitting members who already benefit from name recognition, established donor networks, and the resources of incumbency, including access to traditional, social, and online media channels. New candidates and small parties, in contrast, rely disproportionately on their ability to raise and spend money in the period before nomination, to introduce themselves to voters.
- 1.6 The primary structural mechanism of concern has been described as a multi-branch multiplier. The Commonwealth *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025* caps donations at \$50,000 per recipient per year, with an annual cap of \$800,000 across all recipients. Because a donor can give that amount to each branch of a major party, a single donor can lawfully contribute up to \$450,000 a year to the ALP across its nine branches, or \$400,000 to the Liberal Party, while the same donor can give an independent candidate no more than \$50,000. The Grattan Institute has identified this as a loophole that advantages major parties by applying the cap separately to each party branch. AEC disclosures analysed after the 2025 federal election indicate that approximately \$8 million of Climate 200's donations

would have been blocked under the new rules had they applied, while comparable funding relationships between major parties and their nominated entities and affiliated unions remain largely unaffected.

- 1.7 The real costs of competitive independent campaigns illustrate the scale of the problem. The \$800,000 per-seat spending cap does not reflect what is actually needed for a new entrant to establish name recognition against an incumbent. AEC data from the 2025 election shows individual independent candidates spending well above this figure. Major parties, by contrast, can promote their brand and frontbench MPs in seats other than their own without that spending counting against a local candidate's cap, and can route donations through nominated entities which are entirely exempt from the donation cap, a mechanism unavailable to independents.
- 1.8 Independent candidates also face materially worse tax treatment than party candidates, a disparity set out in detail in Kate Chaney MP's submission to this inquiry (Submission 247). Donations to an independent candidate are taxed at the candidate's own marginal income tax rate as personal income, a treatment not applied to donations received by parties. Separately, donations of up to \$1,500 per year to parties and incumbents are tax-deductible at any time, whereas donations to new independent candidates do not attract that deductibility until the candidate's nomination is formally declared by the Electoral Commissioner, typically only weeks before polling day. The Act should be amended to allow independents to register an Independent Candidate Entity which should be treated the same way as a political party for tax purposes, and tax deductibility for donations to all candidates should apply from the date that candidacy is publicly announced, not from formal nomination.
- 1.9 Implementation of the electoral donation reforms in the 47th Parliament has already been delayed once. The legislation was passed via a Labor–Coalition deal with only two hours of Senate debate on final amendments and no parliamentary committee inquiry, and aspects of the scheme remain subject to ongoing legal risk. Professor Anne Twomey identified to this Inquiry two specific grounds on which the scheme could face High Court challenge: first, that electoral laws cannot be justified as levelling the playing field where they in fact favour sitting members and their parties, which the multi-branch donation multiplier plainly does; and second, that donation caps permitting hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual contributions may not withstand scrutiny as a genuine anti-corruption measure. I also note that a comparable 'nominated entity' regime introduced in Victoria was recently struck down by the High Court. The Committee should not allow its final report to proceed as though these reforms are settled, uncontroversial, or immune from further legal and parliamentary scrutiny.

Recommendation 1

- 1.10 It is my recommendation that the Committee's final report should examine the actual and anticipated impact of the 47th Parliament's donation and expenditure reforms on small parties, independents, and new candidates,**

having regard to the 2025 federal election outcomes and the findings of relevant legal proceedings, before any further implementation proceeds.

Recommendation 2

- 1.11 It is also my recommendation that inequities in the tax treatment of independents and parties should be addressed in the Committee's final report if the government does not act on these prior to that report being released.**

Foreign and domestic interference, and electoral disinformation

- 1.12 The terms of reference ask the Committee to consider the ongoing threats of interference in our electoral system, both foreign and domestic. The interim report's treatment of this issue is limited to a recommendation that the Government undertake a further review (Recommendation 10). It otherwise concludes that the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce did not identify interference meeting its threshold in 2025. I do not consider this an adequate response to the term of reference.
- 1.13 In 2025, unsubstantiated allegations that Labor and independent volunteers in several electorates "might be Chinese spies" were investigated and found to be inaccurate by the EIAT. These hurtful and unfair claims cast a shadow of suspicion over Chinese-Australian volunteers, potentially discouraging their civic participation. Conflation of ethnicity with disloyalty damages both social cohesion and trust in our electoral process. Australia needs robust, evidence-based mechanisms to identify genuine foreign interference in elections, not divisive and damaging rhetoric that smears entire communities. We must protect our democracy without deterring migrant Australians from participating in it.

Recommendation 3

- 1.14 The Committee's final report should recommend standards for greater speed and transparency in EIAT investigations and findings. It should consider how best to foster and protect the engagement of migrant communities in federal elections at a time when some politicians in this country are actively advocating racial intolerance and xenophobia.**
- 1.15 Further to this issue, the Committee has not yet made any substantive recommendation on truth in political advertising laws, despite hearing evidence on the inadequacy of the current authorisation framework.
- 1.16 The Committee has not yet recommended specific regulation of AI-generated and synthetic electoral content, despite noting the increasing prevalence of individually directed communications, deepfakes of election participants, and AI-automated social media accounts. Chapter 4 of the interim report (paragraph 4.19) commits only to gathering further evidence on artificial intelligence. Given the pace at which this technology is being deployed in political campaigning, it would be inappropriate for the Committee to defer this question again in its final report.

Recommendation 4

- 1.17 It is my recommendation that the Committee's final report should include substantive recommendations regarding the need for truth in political advertising laws, and for specific regulation of AI-generated and synthetic electoral content.**

Scrutiny of significant third parties

- 1.18 The Committee has taken evidence from some third party participants in the 2025 federal election, including Climate 200. It has not yet heard from other significant third parties active in the campaign, including Advance and the Plymouth Brethren. The exact nature and extent of these groups' involvement in the federal election, including at polling places – and of their engagement with and funding of other entities and individuals – remains unclear.
- 1.19 I am further concerned that some third party groups which appear to have received significant external funding for campaign activity, such as Repeal the Teal, have not filed returns with the Australian Electoral Commission as legally required. Failure to self-identify as a significant third party, where organisations meet the specific threshold for doing so, enables those organisations to avoid requirements to adhere to regulatory treatments such as transparency requirements, spending limits, and disclosure regimes for donations and political expenditure.

Recommendation 5

- 1.20 I recommend that the Committee should call Advance, the Plymouth Brethren, and other significant third party participants in the 2025 election to give evidence, and that it should seek further advice from the AEC on compliance with and enforcement of disclosure and return obligations by all entities active in that election.**

Safety of candidates, volunteers and campaign workers

- 1.21 The Committee's interim report records evidence of intimidation and harassment of volunteers. I wish to draw the Committee's attention to the safety risks experienced by voters, AEC workers, candidates and their families.
- 1.22 During the 2025 federal election many candidates experienced threats of physical and sexual violence. Campaign signage was defaced aggressively, including with hate symbols. Volunteers were harassed and physically intimidated. Voters were subjected to overcrowding, shepherding, intimidatory tactics, hate speech, and neo-Nazi demonstrations.
- 1.23 Clearly the level of personal risk faced by candidates in federal and state elections has increased in recent years. While the AEC's numbers are difficult to interpret due

to changes in its reporting system, the AFP reported a 17% increase in threats against candidates from 2022 to 2025.

- 1.24 This evidence should inform the Committee's consideration of Recommendations 6, 7, 8 and 11 of the interim report. The Committee's final report should make recommendations on protocols and supports for candidates, volunteers, and campaign workers facing threats of violence, including clear guidance on engagement with the Australian Federal Police and state police. It's only a matter of time until someone is seriously injured at a polling place. At this stage, AEC workers at polling places are largely powerless to prevent that happening.

Comments on specific recommendations

- 1.25 Recommendation 2 (paragraph 2.57): Review of the thresholds under the significant third party and associated entity frameworks must be matched by a corresponding ability to hold those entities to account for their conduct and involvement in political campaigns, particularly at polling places. A revised threshold without enforcement capacity will not address the conduct identified elsewhere in this report.
- 1.26 Recommendation 3 (paragraph 2.58): In developing a mandatory code of conduct for polling place participants, the Committee should consider the involvement of minors at federal polling booths, including their capacity to sign and be held to such a code, and the corresponding responsibilities and accountability of the adults supervising them.
- 1.27 Recommendations 5 and 6 (paragraphs 2.60–2.61): Any system for registration of polling booth campaigners must accommodate the legitimate need of some individuals to maintain privacy about their involvement for professional, legal, or personal reasons. A registration scheme that does not account for these concerns risks deterring participation.
- 1.28 Recommendations 7, 8, 9 and 12 (paragraphs 2.62, 2.63, 2.64, 3.24): The additional powers, training obligations, and extended campaign zone proposed by these recommendations can't be enforced by the AEC's current workforce. The AEC's reliance on short-term, temporarily engaged staff with limited training and authority already makes existing requirements difficult to enforce in practice. Expanding the physical area to be regulated, and the powers of AEC officials within it, without a corresponding expansion in the AEC's permanent, trained workforce will widen the gap between what these recommendations require and what can practically be delivered at polling places. The Committee's final report should recommend that the Government fund a significant expansion in AEC staffing, including the recruitment of a larger permanent cadre of staff sufficient to give effect to these recommendations.
- 1.29 The Committee also needs to consider that Section 340 of the *Electoral Act* prohibits not only electoral activities within the polling zones, but also activities using loudspeakers, broadcasting equipment or devices outside polling zones but close to booths. The use of advertising trucks, drones, and other new technologies should be considered by the Committee.

- 1.30 Recommendation 12 (paragraph 3.27): The evidence to this inquiry confirms that at the 2025 federal election a number of polling sites did not meet basic safety and access standards, and that near-miss traffic incidents, falls and injuries to voters were commonplace. AEC staff identified these risks but had little ability to avert them. Given the increasing trend toward pre-poll voting, the Committee should recommend a shift in the balance of voting infrastructure toward a larger number of pre-poll sites and fewer election day polling booths. The Committee should also recommend that the AEC be required to publish clear, accessible information on the accessibility and facilities of every polling site, including pre-poll sites, well in advance of the election.
- 1.31 Recommendation 14 (paragraph 4.25): Removal or blocking of non-compliant electoral communications, while necessary, is not in my view a sufficient deterrent on its own. Individuals or entities who authorise illegal signage, advertising or communications, whether physical or online, including where that material is paid for by another person or entity, should also be liable to financial penalties. Without a financial consequence attached to authorisation, removal of the material after the fact does little to discourage its initial publication, particularly where the communication has already achieved its purpose by the time it is taken down.
- 1.32 Furthermore, the Court of Disputed Returns should have explicit authority to void an election, or the result in an affected electoral division, where unlawful conduct is shown to have affected the result.

Postal voting arrangements and political party data harvesting

- 1.33 Postal voting deadlines caused real, avoidable harm at recent elections. Despite the challenges encountered during the pandemic in 2022, the AEC still has no ongoing mechanism to process late declaration or postal votes in cases of sudden illness or incapacity. And voters in residential aged care continue to face practical difficulties accessing postal and assisted voting, including in facilities the AEC has limited ability to enter.
- 1.34 I am separately concerned about the harvesting of personal data by political parties through postal vote application processes. Political parties often issue postal vote application forms with addended party information and branding. Personal information provided on these forms, including name, address and contact details, is returned to the party before the AEC, and can be retained and used by the party in ways well beyond the purpose for which it was apparently provided, without the voter's informed consent.
- 1.35 The practices described above are made possible by the substantial exemption registered political parties enjoy from the Australian Privacy Principles under the *Privacy Act 1988*, an exemption not available to businesses, charities, or other organisations handling comparable volumes of personal information. That exemption sits uneasily alongside the privileged access parties already have to the electoral roll.

Recommendation 6

1.36 I suggest that the Committee's final report should recommend:

- a. that postal vote applications be processed exclusively through AEC-branded and AEC-controlled channels, with political party-issued postal vote application forms either prohibited or required to carry clear, prominent disclosure that personal information provided will be used for party purposes;
- b. that the exemption for registered political parties under the *Privacy Act 1988* be removed or substantially narrowed, particularly in relation to personal information obtained through the electoral process; and
- c. that the AEC should be resourced to provide a means for late postal and declaration voting in cases of illness or incapacity, including dedicated support for postal voting from residential aged care.

Outstanding term of reference — composition of the Parliament

1.37 The Inquiry's terms of reference ask the Committee to consider the composition of the parliament as a whole, including the length of the parliamentary term, the potential for fixed terms, and the number of elected representatives relative to growth in population and the size of each electorate. The interim report does not address this term of reference at all. The Committee must come to a position on these matters in its final report.

Dr Monique Ryan MP
Independent Member for Kooyong



Additional comments by Ben Small MP

Ending the Gauntlet

- 1.1 Drawing on submissions and testimony from the AEC and others, the Interim Report points to a range of undesirable conduct, including:
 - Alleged harassment or intimidation between voters and campaign workers near polling places;
 - 'Pushy' conduct by campaign workers, such as blocking walkways, 'bombarding' voters with signs and campaign material, 'aggressively shepherding' vulnerable voters such as older persons or those with mobility issues, and asking individuals how they were intending to vote;
 - Yelling and verbal abuse; and
 - Alleged acts of physical aggression, including individuals invading others' personal space, 'standing over' others, and following people from booths or stalking.
- 1.2 Rather than putting the Government in charge of regulating behaviour within a yet-to-be-defined campaign zone, and the truly absurd notion of putting identifying serial numbers on volunteers with all of the weaponisation of a complaints process that goes with that, the Committee should consider in its final report other options.
- 1.3 One option for consideration is to remove all political participants handing out how-to-vote material at polling places. Under this approach:
 - a. Political participants, including candidates, parties and third parties could still be able to dress polling places up to the 6m line without restriction.
 - b. Voters could still have access to how-to-vote cards, and candidates could still be personally permitted at polling places.
- 1.4 Removing political participants at a booth would address many of the concerns raised with the Committee, without creating a system to be gamed, weaponised or exploited. It would be a reasonable, proportionate and equitable response to the behavioral and security issues on polling booths.
- 1.5 Getting the balance right in such a reform would require extensive consultation and consideration, and should be a focus of the Committee between now and when the Final Report is issued towards the end of 2026.

- 1.6 In her evidence to the JSCEM inquiry, eminent constitutional lawyer Professor Anne Twomey set out the test the High Court applies to restrictions on political communication:
- “...the High Court has said, you can do restrictions on political communication if you’re doing them for a legitimate purpose and your law is reasonably appropriate and adapted to achieve that legitimate purpose in a way that is consistent with the system of representative and responsible government. And the High Court has taken into account that a legitimate purpose is doing things fairly.”¹
- 1.7 There is a strong argument to be made that having too many political participants at a single polling place deters voters from taking any party’s how-to-vote card. The term ‘running the gauntlet’ has now become commonly understood as the challenge that voters face as they simply try to enter a polling place. In heavily contested seats, voters may be solicited by 20-30 individuals before reaching the ‘safety’ of the 6m line.
- 1.8 Australian Psephologist Antony Green has observed in the past:
- “On regulating election day campaigning, most countries sit nearer New Zealand than Australia. Election day is viewed as a time for considered contemplation by voters, not as an opportunity for boisterous last day campaigning.”²
- 1.9 While New Zealand goes much further than anything that would be contemplated by Coalition Members by banning all forms of polling day campaigning and requiring signage to be removed, the contrast is stark.
- 1.10 It is also noted that a number of States and Territories have long implemented different restrictions on conduct at polling booths, from a full ban on how to vote material, to 100 metre exclusion zones and a restriction on the number of signs at polling booths.
- 1.11 There is a strong case for considering options such as this to further enhance Australia’s democracy and improve the voter experience to aid civic engagement in our elections.

Mr Ben Small MP
Liberal Member for Forrest

¹ <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22committees%2Fcommjnt%2F28971%2F0006%22>

² <https://antonygreen.com.au/should-how-to-votes-be-banned-at-australian-elections/>



Additional comments by the Australian Greens

- 1.1 The Australian Greens thank all witnesses and submitters who contributed to the inquiry thus far and acknowledge the breadth of evidence received regarding the conduct of the 2025 federal election.
- 1.2 We note that the 2025 election was marked by a concerning increase in reports of aggressive, intimidating and unsafe behaviour directed towards candidates, volunteers and campaigners. We thank those who came forward to share their experiences and recognise the important contribution they have made to informing this inquiry.
- 1.3 We also acknowledge the broader context in which these discussions are occurring: declining trust in democratic institutions, the increasing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation, and a political environment in which minority communities and vulnerable groups are too often subjected to hostility and targeted abuse.
- 1.4 Any reforms arising from this inquiry should seek to strengthen democratic participation, improve safety, and ensure that all Australians can engage confidently in the electoral process.
- 1.5 We offer the following additional comments.

Volunteer Registration

- 1.6 The Greens support efforts to improve accountability and safety at polling places. However, any volunteer registration scheme must be carefully designed so that it does not create unnecessary barriers to democratic participation.
- 1.7 Volunteering for a political party, candidate or third-party campaign is a legitimate and important form of civic engagement. Reforms should not discourage this participation.
- 1.8 Should a registration scheme be pursued, further work is required regarding privacy protections, data retention arrangements, and how information will be stored, accessed and disposed of. Particular consideration should also be given to practical implementation including volunteers moving between polling places or signing up at short notice, and participation by people under the age of 18 who should be encouraged to engage in democratic processes.

- 1.9 The Committee should also ensure that any registration framework is proportionate to the risks it seeks to address and does not inadvertently discourage volunteers from participating in election campaigns.

Code of Conduct

- 1.10 The Greens support further consideration of a polling place code of conduct that promotes respectful behaviour and protects the safety of voters, volunteers, candidates and election workers.
- 1.11 Any such framework must be carefully calibrated to address genuinely inappropriate conduct without restricting legitimate political communication, campaigning, advocacy or participation, including the ability to speak respectfully to voters.
- 1.12 We note evidence received by the inquiry regarding the filming of volunteers without consent, intentionally antagonistic conduct directed at campaigners, vexatious complaints, and the disproportionate targeting of younger volunteers, particularly young women. We are also concerned about behaviour directed towards people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, First Nations people, LGBTQIA+ Australians, people with disabilities and other groups who already face barriers to participation in public life. Any code of conduct should be designed with the objective of ensuring these individuals can participate safely and confidently in democratic processes.
- 1.13 We also note unresolved questions regarding enforcement, including which agency would be responsible, what powers would be required, and how any framework could be administered consistently across thousands of polling places nationwide.

Campaign Zones

- 1.14 Some evidence before the inquiry raised the possibility of establishing a broader campaign zone beyond the existing six-metre exclusion zone.
- 1.15 The Greens are open to further examination of this proposal but consider that substantial work remains before any recommendation could be implemented. Polling places vary significantly in their physical layouts, surrounding environments and often cohabit sites such as schools or churches. Any expanded zone would need to be flexible, practical and proportionate.
- 1.16 Further consideration should be given to enforcement arrangements, unintended consequences, and whether such zones would meaningfully address inappropriate behaviour or simply displace it beyond the regulated area.
- 1.17 Any reforms must balance the need to protect voters and campaign participants from harassment while preserving the democratic right of parties, candidates, charities, unions and community organisations to communicate with voters. These organisations play a vital role in democratic participation and public debate.

Election Signage

- 1.18 The Greens recognise concerns regarding congestion and accessibility around polling places and support efforts to ensure voting locations remain safe and accessible.
- 1.19 However, any restrictions should not unnecessarily limit political expression or impede voters' access to information. Accessibility outcomes should remain the primary consideration.
- 1.20 We also note that concerns regarding signage often intersect with broader issues relating to misleading political communication and information integrity. Restrictions on the physical presence of campaign material alone will not address the growing challenge posed by false and misleading political advertising.
- 1.21 The Committee should continue to consider the strong case for federal truth in political advertising laws to ensure voters can access accurate information and make informed decisions at the ballot box.

Enforcement and the Role of the AEC

- 1.22 The Greens note evidence from the Australian Electoral Commission regarding the practical difficulties associated with enforcing behavioural standards beyond the existing six-metre exclusion zone.
- 1.23 The AEC's primary role is to administer elections fairly, impartially and efficiently. We remain cautious about proposals that would require the Commission to become the primary arbiter of conduct or behavioural disputes at polling places.
- 1.24 Consideration should also be given to whether other agencies may be better placed to undertake enforcement functions where appropriate, in the wider context of policing political interference and protecting our democracy.

Accessibility of Polling Places

- 1.25 The Greens strongly support efforts to improve the accessibility of polling places and voting options for all Australians.
- 1.26 While we commend the progress made by the AEC, the long-term objective should be that all polling places are completely accessible. No voter should face barriers to participation because of disability, mobility limitations or inaccessible facilities.
- 1.27 We encourage the Government to adopt an aspirational goal of universal accessibility across the polling network and to continue investing in measures that improve participation for voters with disability, older Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and others who may experience barriers to voting.

- 1.28 We also reiterate our support for fixed-term elections, which would assist the AEC in securing suitable venues well in advance.

Broader Democratic Reforms

- 1.29 While improvements to polling place safety and conduct are important, they should be considered as part of a broader program of democratic reform.
- 1.30 The increasing prevalence of misinformation, disinformation and deliberately misleading political advertising poses a significant challenge to informed democratic participation. Reforms that improve safety at polling places should be complemented by measures that strengthen information integrity, reduce the influence of corporate interests, and enfranchise as many voters as possible.

Senator Steph Hodgins-May
Greens Senator for Victoria



Dissenting report by Coalition members of the Committee

1. Less Inquiry, More Hyperpartisan Witch Hunt

- 1.1 Australia's celebrated global position as a vibrant democracy is reliant on a robust electoral system. That system, and the institutions that administer it, have been developed over many years. The Australian Electoral Commission is trusted by Australians, who understand that they are independent, impartial and non-partisan, and that they protect the democratic rights of all Australians.
- 1.2 It is critical that any changes made to Australia's existing electoral system are made to improve our democracy for everyone. Any changes must promote and support participation in the electoral system and maintain absolute trust in the institutions that support our democracy
- 1.3 The Coalition Members of the Committee strongly believe that any proposed electoral changes should be assessed against the following principles:
 - Equal treatment of all political participants;
 - Conduct of fair, open and transparent elections;
 - Encouragement of grassroots political participation without fear of retribution; and
 - Recognising freedom of thought, worship, association and speech as fundamental to free elections and indeed, our Australian values.
- 1.4 The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters has long been respected as a Committee where members from all Parties come together and seek to uphold the Australian way of life through democratic elections. Coalition Members are extremely concerned that since the last election, the Committee has been used by some members of the Government as a political weapon to advance political interests rather than the national interest.
- 1.5 In particular, we note the partisan nature of Committee hearings held during the conduct of this Inquiry, compared to those in previous JSCEM inquiries. Together with the redaction of evidence presented to the Committee, there is a risk the Committee's important work is undermined by the increasing perception of political obstruction.
- 1.6 The Coalition Members of the Committee believe that those who choose to actively join or actively support political parties, like those who support civil society movements or not-for-profit organisations, do so on the basis of sincerely held beliefs and a genuine desire to participate in their democratic society. Members of

established political parties are no 'less worthy' than those who support other forms of political campaigning, 'movements' or civil society causes.

- 1.7 The governing framework for political participation should ultimately encourage grassroots participation, not make it harder. The recommendations of the Coalition Members of the Committee are focused on improving Australia's democracy and making it easier for everyday Australians to be actively involved in our elections.
- 1.8 Coalition Members of the Committee acknowledge the accounts of antisocial behaviour put before the Committee, and condemn aggressive, obstructive or intimidating conduct of any participant. No volunteer, candidate or voter should feel unsafe taking part in an election. Indeed, the Coalition welcomed the terms of reference including such conduct after Coalition volunteers have been targets for intimidation by unions and other third party organisations on polling booths for many elections.
- 1.9 As noted in the Liberal Party submission to the Inquiry, "Liberal Party volunteers have been the subject of aggressive bullying, physical and verbal abuse from the Left for decades. This has been detailed in successive Liberal Party submissions to this Committee."
- 1.10 The Coalition Members of the Committee dissent with the Government Report on the conclusions drawn from that evidence and on the remedies proposed. Several of the recommendations would expand the regulatory and enforcement reach of the State over ordinary political participation, in ways that would burden grassroots involvement and that sit uneasily with the constitutionally implied freedom of political communication.
- 1.11 Early in the inquiry the committee, including members of the coalition agreed to resolutions to manage the receipt and publication of submissions. Unfortunately the subsequent interpretation of those resolutions has resulted in significant redactions of information from submissions which has had the effect of obscuring important evidence to the inquiry and the consequence of limiting the reporting transparency and scope of the interim report.
- 1.12 The committee was faced with the farcical situation where members of parliament had their names redacted from their own submissions and political parties likewise, a situation only resolved by individual resolutions of the committee.
- 1.13 This anomaly will need to be rectified as the inquiry proceeds to ensure that the committee can appropriately address the full terms of reference with full transparency including appropriately addressing adverse comment included in but redacted from submissions in accordance with usual parliamentary practice.
- 1.14 Of particular concern is that the conduct of one of the Parliament's most serious Committees has been reduced to a partisan witch hunt of Australians based on their religious faith.

- 1.15 The Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC) called this out in their submission to the Inquiry. Indeed, the PBCC noted that:
- Our church has been prompted to make this submission in part by the unprecedented assault which has been launched against us by members of Parliament.
- 1.16 The redaction process obscured the names of those alleged to have engaged in that behaviour when the PBCC's submission was published. Fortunately, *The Daily Telegraph* on November 14, 2025 published an article, stating that the full version of the submission included:
- Mr Jerome Laxale MP said the involvement of members of our church 'felt like an assault on democracy'. Imagine if he had said that about parishioners from any other church.
- Mr Andrew Charlton MP arguably took it one step further and approached volunteers and filmed them while asking 'are you a member of the Exclusive Brethren?'. We ask members of this committee imagine for a moment if Mr Charlton had asked 'are you a Jew' or 'a Muslim person', or 'a Catholic' or 'a Hindu' instead.
- 1.17 Coalition Members are deeply troubled of the pursuit by any political party against another group based on their religion, ethnicity, gender or creed. All Australians should be free to engage in the political discourse without fear of religious targeting, regardless of whether they are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Bretheren or any other religion.
- 1.18 On 25 June 2026, the Chair of the Committee, Mr Jerome Laxale MP, made a Public Statement that the Committee would summons the PBCC and Advance Australia to appear before the Committee. Both of those witnesses had previously agreed to appear, however, scheduling clashes had precluded planned appearances proceeding. The Deputy Chair subsequently released a media statement rebuking the Chair.
- 1.19 What is particularly confronting about the summons to the PBCC being threatened is that the Committee had already received a letter from the PBCC's Director which is worth stating in full for the record. Coalition Members note that this was publicly released by the PBCC in response to a media story, and the letter, addressed to the Inquiry Secretary, states:
- I write to update my correspondence of 22 June 2026, after the realisation that I had inadvertently referenced the incorrect date for the media story. The updated letter is below. I look forward to your response in due course.
- I write to raise serious concerns about the Joint Standing Committee's conduct following media reports in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age which on 30 May 2026 published a story which stated:
- "Former members of the church, speaking anonymously out of concerns for retribution, have told this masthead that a senior Brethren figure had agreed to

appear before the Committee but, after the hearing date was confirmed, had pulled out of the grilling."

These reports are wrong. My engagement with this process has been conducted in good faith. And to that end, to date I have also not shared our correspondence with anyone outside of my immediate team.

As the Committee is the only other party to our correspondence, it is clear that our exchanges have been wilfully misrepresented and leaked to the media. This is a damning indictment of the Committee's integrity and handling of confidential information.

Regrettably, this is just the latest serious breach of trust. Since the Inquiry was established, we have documented:

- Undisclosed conflicts of interest: Michael Butterworth, a Member of the Committee Chair's staff, made a submission critical of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, without disclosing his employer or any party affiliation.
- Selective witness recruitment and evidence publication: Two prominent anti-PBCC activists were actively pursued to give evidence despite making no submissions.
- Failure of process: A submission from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, which aligned in part with our perspectives and which was dated November, did not appear online until May.
- Leaking of confidential information: The Committee has now leaked our correspondence to the media, anti-Church activists, or both.

This pattern of behaviour is not consistent with an impartial Parliamentary Inquiry. It has the hallmarks of a taxpayer-funded campaign against our Church.

Despite these concerns, I remain willing to appear before the Committee in order to state the facts. This is my third offer in writing to do so.

I look forward to working with you to find an appropriate date. Perhaps we could arrange a time after the Chair returns from the World Cup in North America.

I also look forward to hearing from you regarding my concerns outlined above.

- 1.20 It should alarm every Australian who believes in the freedoms of this nation that a church group should feel compelled to write such an astonishing letter to a Parliamentary Committee, let alone one charged with stewarding our system of democracy. The public record features no response from the Committee on the very grave concerns raised, and indeed, just three days after the letter, the Committee Chair issued the public threat of a summons as described at 1.18 above.
- 1.21 Other potential witnesses who possessed valuable testimony about the Inquiry Terms of Reference and had received letters suggesting that they appear – but had not done so – were not subject to the threat of summons.
- 1.22 Yet, on March 21, 2026, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that:

A Labor MP's father, who hurled homophobic insults at a Liberal volunteer outside a polling place, has been invited to give evidence at a parliamentary inquiry into last year's federal election.

- 1.23 The same article continued, identifying "Alain Laxale, Labor Bennelong MP's Jerome Laxale's dad" and stated that the invitation noted:

Given this public record of your vile, homophobic and intimidatory conduct at a polling booth ... your perspective and knowledge of these behaviours would be of use to the committee as it seeks to stamp out aggressive and intimidating behaviour towards political participants, voters, and AEC officials.

- 1.24 Of course, the poor behaviour on polling booths was not limited to aggressive or intimidatory behaviour being directed at people, but included a very high profile case of political signs being stolen. Despite being caught red-handed stealing an opponent's signs, Mr Peter Jordan was not summonsed to appear before the Committee and yet on April 2, 2025, the *Australian Financial Review* reported that:

The Liberal candidate for Kooyong has taken a swipe at incumbent teal MP Monique Ryan after Ryan's husband was caught on camera removing opposition campaign signs last week.

The Liberal party, on behalf of Hamer, has placed campaign signs across the inner Melbourne seat of Kooyong that ask for Ryan to leave signs alone, in what is the latest chapter of the tit-for-tat signage scandal. "Monique, please DO NOT take this sign!" the campaign sign reads.

The new Hamer campaign signs come after the independent MP's husband Peter Jordan was filmed last week removing one of the Liberal candidate's campaign signs.

- 1.25 A reasonable observer of the Inquiry might wonder at threats of summons being issued to the Labor Party's opponents, whereas no such threat – nor indeed any actual summons - was issued to participants who were supportive of progressive politics and yet documented publicly as being of interest to the Terms of Reference.
- 1.26 This is documented evidence of the Committee being used for hyperpartisan targeting of electoral participants who opposed the Labor Party during the election campaign, whilst being used to run a protection racket for Labor Party supporters who were documented as behaving in the most egregious, if not outright unlawful of ways, and it will not be tolerated by Coalition Members.

2. Matters the interim report fails to address

- 1.27 The report is notable for what it does not address. The Inquiry began on 3 September 2025, meaning that 300 days have passed before this 'interim' report is tabled.
- 1.28 The fact that it has not provided even a preliminary response to all Terms of Reference is serious flaw in the Inquiry's Interim Report because the Committee has

received large amounts of evidence about all items listed in the Inquiry Terms of Reference.

- 1.29 The Special Minister of State also expressly asked the Committee to consider the interaction of its inquiry with the operation of the electoral reform passed by the 47th Parliament and with the composition of the Parliament as a whole. Both matters attracted substantial evidence, provided to the Committee in good faith by witnesses. The interim report makes no comment and no recommendation relating to either, simply noting that they will be considered in the Final Report.
- 1.30 The Coalition members of the Committee consider it telling that the interim report is totally silent on the two matters within the terms of reference of greatest financial and structural consequence to the conduct of elections in Australia.
- 1.31 The Government must come clean with Australians in the JSCEM Final Report – does Labor have a secret plan to sting taxpayers \$600m for more Labor politicians or not?
- 1.32 Further, it is imperative that given the evidence provided by the AEC, political parties and administrators, the final report should also consider the AEC’s preparedness for the delayed implementation of electoral reform from 1 January 2027, particularly in light of *Hopper v Victoria* [2026] HCA case and the administrative burden arising from monthly disclosure reporting commencing on 1 July 2026, including whether the AEC’s systems, APIs and reporting infrastructure are fully operational and tested.
- 1.33 Coalition Members are concerned that given the significant reforms that will take effect on 1 January 2027 that further significant amendments to the *Electoral Act* will both stretch the AEC’s ability to implement further reform between now and the next election, and to create further confusion and regulatory difficulties for political participants. It is noted that there are instances in Australia and around the world where electoral commissions have been provided with too much change which has compromised their core responsibilities to competently deliver elections.

3. Government Recommendations a Legal Mine Field

- 1.34 At the outset, the Government’s Report includes the following recommendations which are listed in the table below for ease of reference against the Coalition’s response.

Item	Committee Recommendation	Coalition Committee Members’ Position
2	That the thresholds under the significant third party and associated entity frameworks be reviewed to ensure that coordinated involvement in the electoral process at scale is adequately captured	OPPOSE

3	<p>That the Australian Government introduces legislation to amend the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to provide a statutory framework for the Australian Electoral Commissioner to make an enforceable and mandatory code of conduct for candidates, elected representatives, campaign workers, third party participants, and volunteers within and around federal polling booths.</p>	OPPOSE
4	<p>That, in developing the code of conduct, the Australian Electoral Commissioner be required to undertake open consultation with political participants.</p>	OPPOSE
5	<p>That, in a manner consistent with the registration of scrutineers and to increase accountability of behaviour at polling places, the Australian Electoral Commissioner develop and maintain a system of registration of polling booth campaigners by candidates and third parties campaigning at polling places.</p>	OPPOSE
6	<p>That all candidates, elected representatives, campaign workers, third party participants, and volunteers be required to formally register their agreement to comply with the code of conduct prior to working on a polling booth.</p>	OPPOSE
7	<p>That the Australian Electoral Commission be granted additional statutory powers to address aggressive behaviour</p>	OPPOSE

and misconduct at polling places
(cont.)

8	That the Australian Electoral Commission develops and delivers comprehensive training for senior polling place officials on enforcing the code of conduct, and on when and how to escalate responses to incidents at polling places.	OPPOSE
9	That a new 'campaign zone' be created beyond the six-metre exclusion zone for each polling location in which (cont.)	OPPOSE
10	That the Australian Government undertake a review of electoral laws with a view to protect the electoral process and voter experience from domestic interference.	OPPOSE
11	That, due to privacy and safety risks, the Australian Government take urgent action to develop guidelines or amend such legislation as would be required to ensure that the use of public access terminals is limited to electoral purposes only and that users are known to the Electoral Commissioner.	SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE
12	That the Australian Electoral Commission reviews the resourcing requirements and duration of pre-poll voting to ensure adequate arrangements are in place, noting the increasing numbers of electors voting by ordinary pre-poll and the need to ensure the safety and quality of the voter experience.	OPPOSE
13	That the Australian Electoral Commission sets the goal of ensuring that the majority of	SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

polling places in each electorate are physically accessible, provide step-free access for mobility assistance devices, have sufficient toilet facilities available for public use, and have sufficient and clearly marked accessible parking bays close to the entrance.

- 14 That the Australian Government introduces legislation to amend the authorisation framework and requirements for electoral matter under the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE
-

- 1.35 Recommendation 2: The Coalition believes that it is important that the voting public are able to clearly identify political parties and third party actors in Australia’s political process and would support a transparent process to consider the amendment of existing mechanisms to more appropriately identify for voters all parties that are funding electoral matter or campaigning as third parties (see Section 4 below). As drafted, the Recommendation just continues the witch hunt of religious Australians and can’t be accepted by Coalition Members.
- 1.36 The Committee appears to have given no consideration to the constitutional implications of several recommendations (Recommendations 3-10). The Committee’s recommendations would create a regime under which:
- Political campaigners must register with the government before engaging in political communication at polling places;
 - Campaigners must agree to a government-approved code of conduct;
 - The AEC would be empowered to remove individuals from polling places for alleged breaches;
 - Political activity would be regulated within newly created “campaign zones” extending beyond the existing statutory exclusion zone; and
 - The number of campaigners and amount of campaign material could be capped or restricted by regulation.
- 1.37 There is a real risk that these recommendations would chill lawful political participation, particularly by volunteers, smaller parties and community organisations with limited compliance resources.
- 1.38 Further, the High Court has consistently recognised that the Constitution protects an implied freedom of political communication. While that freedom is not absolute, any law burdening political communication must be reasonably appropriate and

proportionate to a legitimate purpose compatible with Australia's system of representative and responsible government.

- 1.39 Measures requiring prior registration, imposing government-approved behavioural standards as a condition of participation, restricting the number of campaigners, or empowering officials to exclude individuals from political activity engage serious constitutional questions.
- 1.40 Following the seminal decision of the High Court in *Lange v Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (1997), which effectively established the existence of an implied freedom of political communication as an Australian constitutional protection, a series of cases has refined the relevant test and analysis of whether a law is invalid for breaching the implied freedom, including most recently in *Babet v The Commonwealth* [2025] and *Hopper v Victoria* [2026].
- 1.41 In brief, the question of whether an impugned law is invalid for impermissibly burdening the implied freedom of political communication falls to be assessed by reference to three well-established questions:
- Does the impugned law effectively burden freedom of communication about governmental or political matters in its terms, operation or effect?;
 - Is the purpose of the law legitimate, in the sense that it is compatible with the maintenance of the constitutionally prescribed system of representative and responsible government?; and
 - Is the impugned law reasonably appropriate and adapted to advance that purpose in a manner that is compatible with the maintenance of that constitutionally prescribed system of government?
- 1.42 Relevantly, the High Court has considered the application of the implied freedom of political communication in the context of, in essence, place-based controls in both *Brown v Tasmania* (2017) and *Clubb v Edwards*. Challenging any laws flowing from the Committee's recommendations, and certainly critiquing those recommendations themselves in the interim, on the basis that they infringe the constitutional protections over political communication and involvement in the political process is plainly possible in the circumstances.
- 1.43 The Committee has not demonstrated that existing criminal laws, public order laws, anti-discrimination laws and electoral offences are insufficient to deal with serious misconduct. Further, the AEC has confirmed that in the instances where it has raised any issues with political parties, that they have acted (F098 Senate Estimates Question On Notice).
- 1.44 A mandatory registration scheme for polling booth campaigners risks imposing substantial administrative burdens on volunteers, particularly elderly volunteers and occasional participants. In practice, federal elections involves tens of thousands of individual volunteers. Unlike scrutineers, campaigners are often volunteers who participate for only a few hours. Requiring registration, training and formal acceptance of a code of conduct may undermine grassroots political engagement.

- 1.45 Perhaps most concerningly, in light of the evidence of political participants using mobile phones to video encounters with other political participants, a centrally-operated registration system could weaponise a complaint system.
- 1.46 The proposal for the creation of an expanded campaign zone risks creating uncertainty and conflict rather than reducing it. The report does not define the size, boundaries or permissible activities within a campaign zone, leaving substantial discretion to regulators. Many polling places operate on vastly different physical footprints. A one-size-fits-all approach would be difficult to implement consistently.
- 1.47 Restricting signage and campaign activity outside the existing six-metre exclusion zone raises significant implied freedom of political communication considerations when considered against the basic tests set out at 1.40. It could also create an advantage for some parties or candidates, based on how many third-party groups were backing it. For example, if political candidates and third parties were all able to display limited number of signs, then a greater proportion of polling booth material and volunteers could come from third party groups, rather than the candidates and parties on the ballot paper as has typically been the case in Australia.
- 1.48 The Committee appears to take concerns about enthusiastic campaigning, high volunteer numbers, coordinated advocacy and issue-based campaigning, and then attempts to reframe them through the language of “domestic interference”. This is a dangerous path. In a democracy, Australians are entitled to organise, advocate, persuade, campaign, protest and seek to influence electoral outcomes.
- 1.49 The report repeatedly references concerns about coordinated activity by third parties, shared messaging, large volunteer operations and issue campaigns. Yet these activities have always formed part of democratic participation. Trade unions, business groups, environmental organisations, industry associations, religious groups, charities and advocacy organisations have all engaged in coordinated political activity for decades.
- 1.50 The report never clearly defines what “domestic interference” means. Instead, it appears to suggest that lawful political participation becomes suspect when it is:
- well organised;
 - well resourced;
 - coordinated across electorates; or
 - undertaken by groups outside the established party system.
- 1.51 This is not a reasonable or workable legal principle. How does that apply to the unions, business groups, environmental organisations, industry associations, religious groups, charities and advocacy organisations that have engaged in political activity for decades?
- 1.52 Without a clear and narrow definition, the concept of domestic interference risks becoming a vehicle for regulating political actors whose views, methods or effectiveness are unpopular with those in power. The Committee itself acknowledges

that the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce found no foreign interference that compromised the election and notes that there is currently no specific criminal offence of domestic interference.

- 1.53 Rather than inventing a vague new category of electoral wrongdoing, Parliament should focus on conduct, not viewpoints. If behaviour involves threats, intimidation, harassment, obstruction, violence, fraud or unlawful coordination, existing laws should be enforced. If it is lawful political advocacy, even vigorous advocacy, it should remain protected.
- 1.54 The danger of the Committee’s approach is that it risks shifting the focus from preventing misconduct to regulating political participation itself.

4. Loopholes Left Untouched

- 1.55 In its submission, the Liberal Party noted two new avenues where voters are receiving content that is political in nature, reportedly funded by political parties, candidates or other groups, but where there is no authorisation required under the current legislative framework.
- Online content creators being paid by political parties and candidates, without disclosing that they were in receipt of payment; or
 - Political content dressed up as “news”
- 1.56 It is important that both of the above elements be captured by any amended authorisation legislation. There have been a number of reports of online content creators being paid by political parties and candidates, without disclosing that they were in receipt of payment. In late 2021 it was reported that the Labor Party had engaged a US-based marketing agency which was “paying TikTok users to post anti-Scott Morrison sponsored content”. (<https://www.crikey.com.au/2021/11/18/tiktok-users-anti-scott-morrison-content/>)
- 1.57 With regard to the rise of paid influencers, on 26 March 2025, the Sydney Morning Herald reported:

The Australian Labor Party has compensated some of the social media influencers who covered the federal budget for their travel to Canberra, after inviting them to attend the lock-up as part of a campaign strategy to court prominent online voices...¹

On 11 April 2025, the ABC reported that:

Independent MP Allegra Spender has admitted to paying an agency to commission social media content from influencers.

¹ <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/lululemon-brand-ambassador-finance-advisers-13-content-creators-get-advance-budget-reading-20250325-p5lmdc.html>

Instagram content creator Milly Rose Bannister posted several videos this month, with a few disclosing they were "made in collaboration with Allegra Spender".²

On 17 April 2025, the ABC reported that:

The podcast company associated with the satirical news publication Betoota Advocate has been quietly contracted to run an election strategy podcast strategy for Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on behalf of the Labor Party, the ABC can exclusively reveal.³

Konrad Benjamin, who produces political content on "Punter's Politics" platforms (with 478,000 followers on Instagram, 176,000 subscribers on YouTube and 118,000 followers on TikTok) recently spoke of the inevitability of parties spending money on influencers:

Do I worry that a politician might approach me with a checkbook to get their endorsement? We'll see how large that number is. But I mean, it's inevitable, right?

Because that's essentially what influencers are. Marketing has now just infiltrated our friend groups and just everyday punters. And so now everyone's selling you something no matter what it is.

And so politics is another product to sell. So of course, it's definitely going to happen for sure.⁴

- 1.58 If influencers are in receipt of funding from a political party or independent (or through an agency acting on behalf of a political party or other political actor), voters deserve to know.
- 1.59 The Electoral Act requires that electoral matter communicated "by, or on behalf of, a disclosure entity, that is intended to affect voting in a federal election" be authorised.
- 1.60 The Electoral Act (section 321D) specifies that authorisation of electoral matter is required if the content of an advertisement is approved by a person, whether or not that person is a person who has paid for the distribution or production of the advertisement.
- 1.61 Given the growth of new forms of online content and the rise of online influencers with very large audiences, could it be possible for a political party, associated entity or third parties, to pay content creators without necessarily "approving" the content and requiring their own authorisation?
- 1.62 Political parties could not, and would not, contemplate trying to get around disclosure rules by paying television, radio or print media identities to give them favourable

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-04-11/allegra-spender-paid-agency-for-influencer-posts-election-2025/105168154>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-04-17/prime-ministers-secret-podcast-strategists-albanese-betoota/105180156>

⁴ The Briefing podcast, 28 November 2024

coverage. However, it would appear they can online. Transparency in politics is very important. Voters deserve to know when content they are receiving is electoral matter and who is funding it.

- 1.63 Voters deserve to know if content creators or ‘influencers’ are being paid by Australian political entities (either directly or through intermediaries) to produce electoral matter. This should be captured in any amended legislation.
- 1.64 Any amended legislation should also consider whether the distinction that exists in the Electoral Act between who approves electoral matter and who pays for the communication of the electoral matter is fit for purpose in a digital age.
- 1.65 A new development at the 2025 election was the emergence of what *appeared* to be local news outlets that weaved partisan political stories – clearly intended to promote specific candidates and criticise Coalition policy – within a mix of other local news content, providing the pretence of being a genuine “news” publication.
- 1.66 In late 2024, a new online “news” source, called “*Gazette News*” emerged, which has the following “mastheads”:
 - *The North Shore Lorikeet*
 - *The Eastern Melburnian*
 - *The West Vic Brolga*
 - *The Mid North Coaster*
 - *The Gippsland Monitor*
 - *The National Account* ⁵
- 1.67 The five local mastheads all operate and advertise in geographic areas closely mirroring electorates that were strongly contested by so-called Teal ‘independents’, backed by Climate 200 at the last election.
- 1.68 These digital platforms promoted stories on independent candidates for the 2025 federal election. For example, as reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

The outlet focuses much of its political coverage on Climate 200-backed independents, without mentioning the candidates are backed by Simon Holmes a Court’s funding vehicle.

“Independent candidate Deb Leonard goes door-to-door in Inverloch,” one reporter writes in the *Gazette’s* *Gippsland Monitor*, dated March 3.

In an Instagram post on the page of *Gazette’s* *West Vic Brolga* on March 3, a journalist asks: “What are you doing tonight? If you’re in or around Warrnambool, you might want to pop into Deakin Uni to catch the Independent candidate making a play for Wannon, Alex Dyson, in conversation with former rugby legend and current ACT Independent senator David Pocock.”

⁵ See www.gazettenews.au

The posts and articles have been shared by teal candidates including Bradfield's Nicolette Boele, who in February posted a North Shore Lorikeet article covering her launch event, titled: "Independent Nicolette Boele says the major parties have failed Bradfield."⁶

1.69 These digital platforms also promoted stories heavily criticising Coalition policy, including alarmist content about nuclear power. For example, the following articles all appeared in different *Gazette News* mastheads on the same day, being 11 March 2025:

- "Disaster at proposed Mount Piper nuclear site could impact North Shore residents".
- "Nuclear fallout under Coalition plan could reach Mid North Coast, new report claims".
- "Disaster report shows 30km nuclear plume descending on Melbourne's eastern suburbs".⁷

1.70 Various stories were subsequently turned into ads that *Gazette News* ran on digital platforms.

1.71 Candidates associated with Climate 200 engaged with *Gazette News* material and linked to these stories in their social media posts.

1.72 Neither *Gazette News*, nor any of the individual publications, are members of the Australian Press Council.

1.73 The president of Country Press Australia, Andrew Schreyer, warned of the threat posed to the integrity of political advertising regulations and public trust in truly independent news sources from politically motivated news outlets like *Gazette News*:

"It's all too easy now to set up a 'news' website that publishes political propaganda dressed up as journalism and amplified through social media campaigns," he said.

"Most of our Country Press Australia member newspapers have news websites and a history dating back well over 100 years," he said.

"We are concerned the actions of this single organisation could undermine the respect readers have for authentic public interest journalism."⁸

1.74 It has been reported the primary backers of *Gazette News* include Matthew Doran, James Taylor (William Taylor Nominees) and Mark Rawson. According to the AEC's Transparency Register, these individuals and company have collectively donated

⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/coalition-makes-formal-complaint-over-pro-teal-spin-in-fake-newspaper-20250311-p5limh.html>

⁷ North Shore Lorikeet, The Gippsland Monitor, The Mid North Coaster, The Eastern Melburnian, 11/3/2025

⁸ <https://www.bandt.com.au/teal-tinted-news-gazette-accused-of-political-propaganda-amid-funding-scrutiny/>

over \$2,000,000 to Climate 200, Senator David Pocock and Teal MP Allegra Spender since FY2021-22.⁹

- 1.75 These individuals have demonstrated a clear financial connection to Climate 200 and its associated candidates and had an evident interest in influencing the 2025 federal election. That this egregious exploitation of a loophole in the *Electoral Act* is not considered by the Government's Recommendations is appalling, and exposes the hyperpartisan approach to the entire Inquiry.

5. A Perfect Prepoll Period?

- 1.76 Coalition Members previously recommended the pre-poll period be statutorily limited to be a maximum of one week prior to election day and that the Australian Electoral Commission provide parties and candidates with the earliest possible advice about prepoll locations.
- 1.77 Coalition Members continue to recommend the prepoll period be truncated from its current protracted period, and the AEC be more strident on ensuring that people accessing pre-poll are doing so for one of the reasons prescribed in the Act.
- 1.78 An examination of the pre-poll voting rates at all recent federal elections, the Voice referendum and by-elections demonstrates that the largest pre-poll voting day is always the Friday before election day, generally followed by the Thursday before election day, et cetera.
- 1.79 At the last federal election, more than 65% of pre-poll votes were cast in the second week of pre-poll.
- 1.80 A shorter pre-poll period would reduce the administrative and resourcing burden on candidates, and it would also mean voters cast their ballots with the most current information, rather than weeks before polling day and before the campaign has run its course.
- 1.81 Voters who need to vote prior to polling day and prior to the pre-poll period are also able to apply for a postal vote. Limiting pre-poll to five days would not, therefore, restrict any voters' ability to cast their ballot.
- 1.82 Pairing a shorter pre-poll period while maintaining the current level of resourcing would give the AEC the flexibility to either double the number of pre-poll centres or to create larger super pre-poll centres with additional resourcing. This would directly address any operational concerns raised by the AEC.
- 1.83 The AEC accepts that a shorter pre-poll period would not suppress early voting – turnout in the pre-poll period has been shown to grow regardless of its length.

⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/coalition-makes-formal-complaint-over-pro-teal-spin-in-fake-newspaper-20250311-p5limh.html>

- 1.84 The notion that because pre-poll has become popular, the Government should consider extending pre-poll is preposterous. If we conducted a plebiscite, abolishing compulsory voting would possibly be popular too, and yet as stewards of our electoral system, it would be irresponsible in the highest degree to suggest weakening such a key characteristic of our electoral system.
- 1.85 The better question is how we can enhance the voter experience to preserve, protect and enhance our precious democracy. Ensuring the most number of voters mark a ballot with access to the same information and at the same point in time is an essential characteristic of our electoral system.

Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck
Deputy Chair

Senator the Hon James McGrath
LNP Senator for Queensland

Mr Ben Small MP
Liberal Member for Forrest