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YEAR IN REVIEW

Commissioner's review



Electoral Commissioner, Tom Rogers

The 2014–15 financial year was characterised by recovery and stabilisation after one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of the AEC. I was privileged to have been appointed to the position of Electoral Commissioner in December 2014, which provided the opportunity to continue driving forward a wide range of long-term projects that were already underway. Despite significant pressure on the agency, we have made enormous strides forward in our change journey, focusing on how we can improve the long-term planning, preparation and delivery of federal elections at every level of the AEC.

In recognition of the importance of this change journey and the role of our local leaders, we gathered our senior executive and executive level staff for a leadership conference in May 2015. This conference provided our leaders with the opportunity to step back and consider our change journey as a whole and assisted them in identifying the individual and collective actions, skills and behaviours needed to support this journey.

The change journey is designed to deliver long-term improvements to:

- election planning and preparation
- election delivery in the areas of ballot paper handling and security, visual identification of AEC staff, visitors and scrutineers in polling places, use of out-posted centres and the management of election waste
- recruitment, training and development of permanent and temporary staff
- compliance and quality assurance in procurement processes
- compliance and assurance in funding and disclosure processes
- changes in the AEC culture.

Over the past 12 months, the AEC has been engaged in significant planning and preparatory work for a range of projects scheduled for progressive delivery throughout the coming years. These projects are absolutely fundamental to the AEC's future success and the work involved to get these projects to this point has been significant.

While some of the more significant changes may not be in full operation at the next federal election, each will contribute to the AEC's long-term goal of re-establishing its reputation for delivering trusted, consistently reliable, high quality and high integrity electoral events and services. The AEC's Corporate Plan, prepared during the 2014–15 financial year and published in August 2015, sets out how we will achieve this long-term goal and the strategies we are implementing to get us there.

AEC values and commitments

A fundamental element of the AEC's change journey is the ongoing commitment to the core AEC values: electoral integrity through quality, agility and professionalism. These values are supported by the organisational commitment to the ballot paper principles and the every task matters principle. The AEC is referring to the values, principles and the every task matters principle collectively as 'values and commitments', as illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

The AEC has implemented a number of changes to reinforce these values and commitments, particularly in the areas of governance and oversight. We are committed to the continuous improvement of our governance arrangements so that I and the rest of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) have an appropriate level of visibility across the agency, to ensure operational compliance and to enhance oversight of election planning and preparation. We are now building on these improvements by creating a governance structure centred on a suite of decision-making committees that have more formalised and focused roles, along with discussion forums to encourage open communication across the agency.

The agency has also continued to improve its strategic and corporate planning, increasing our ability to be agile in an environment characterised by the need for adaptability and responsiveness.

Election readiness

During 2014–15, the AEC developed and continued to actively implement a unified election readiness framework that drives quality election planning and ensures that preparations are comprehensive and professional. This framework will enhance our ability to deliver nationally consistent, high integrity elections.

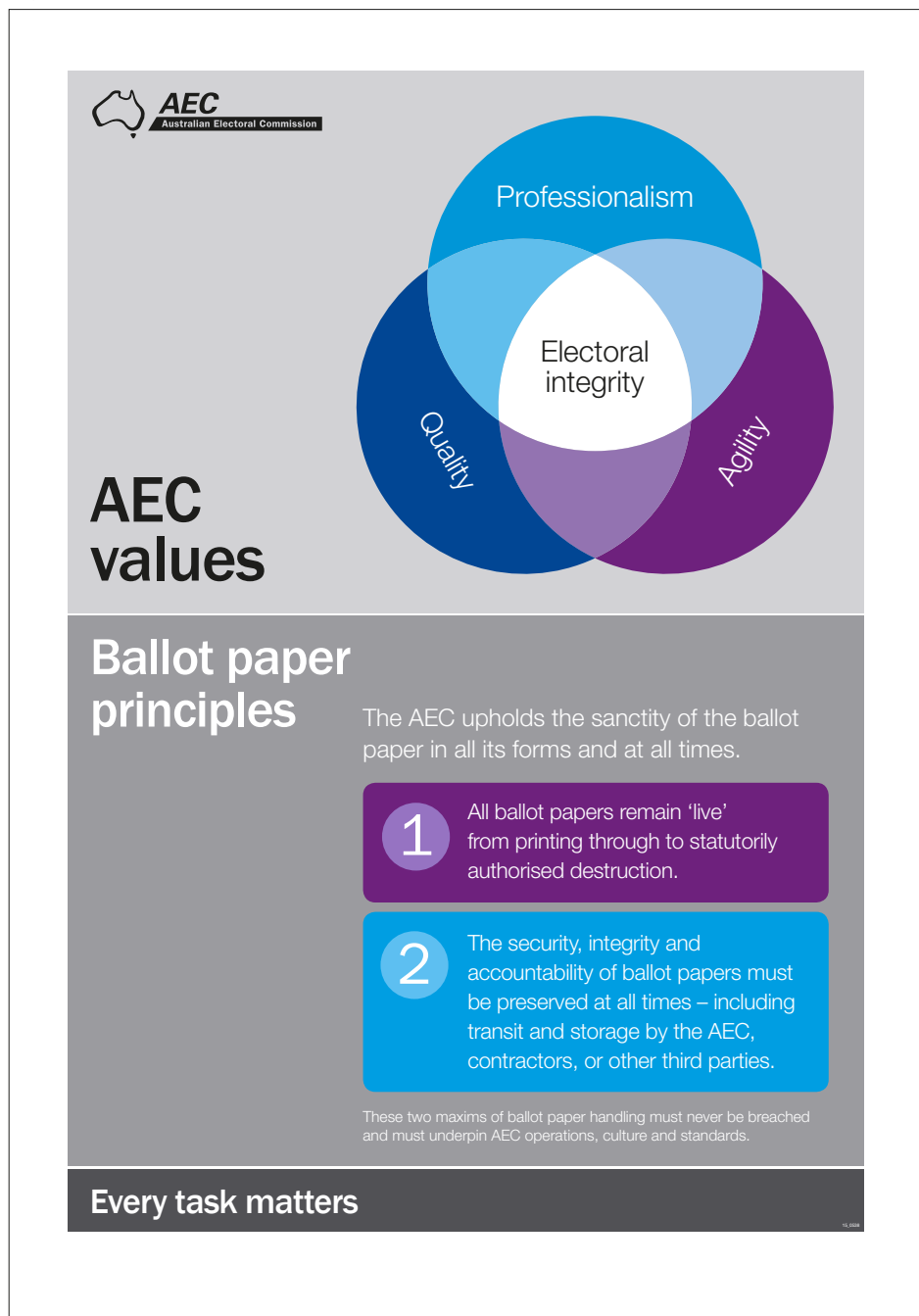
We also continued a significant review of internal procedures and service delivery, with a focus on electoral policy and procedures, the development of new materials and forms, applying assurance mechanisms and implementing compliance processes.

Financial and resource management

In 2014–15 the AEC recorded an operating deficit of \$0.4 million including depreciation. This represents an underspend of \$7.2 million when compared to our estimated actual result in the 2015–16 Portfolio Budget Statement and is attributable to both higher than forecast revenue and lower employee numbers due to restrictions on recruitment.

During 2014–15 our internal budgeting model and methodology was updated to ensure the AEC Corporate Plan drives resourcing decisions. Efficient and effective resource allocation, along with financial management reporting, is a key contributor to the success of the agency's change journey.

Figure 1: AEC values and commitments



2016 and beyond

Despite this unprecedented era of change, the AEC continues to assess and monitor its responsibilities in the key areas of active electoral roll management, efficient polling services and targeted education and public awareness programmes, as well as working to meet the expectations of the Australian Parliament and the public.

During the coming year, as we move towards the next federal election and our first opportunity to publicly demonstrate the progress we have made in our change journey, we will continue to focus on improving the processes that guide our service delivery, monitoring our performance, ensuring accountability and steering our agency towards the delivery of trusted, consistently reliable electoral events.

CASE STUDY

Establishment of the Electoral Integrity Unit

An important aspect of the AEC's work in contributing to impartial, accurate and transparent electoral outcomes is the principle of electoral integrity. As noted in the AEC's 2013–14 Annual Report, one aspect of the agency's renewed commitment to high standards of electoral integrity involved establishing the Electoral Integrity Unit (EIU) in July 2014.

The EIU works to ensure the Australian community has confidence in the integrity of the practices, processes and policies underpinning the electoral system.

The scope of the EIU is to examine both enrolment and elections, with enrolment being the primary focus over the course of the 2014–15 financial year. Working with the Roll Management Branch and other AEC business areas, the EIU:

- reviewed the Federal Direct Enrolment and Update (FDEU) program
- reviewed the integrity of the Online Enrolment Service (OES)
- examined a range of apparent anomalies and matters relating to allegedly fraudulent enrolments and liaised with internal and external stakeholders as necessary
- examined the characteristics of electors with divergent Commonwealth/state enrolment as part of developing strategies to minimise current and future roll divergence
- undertook assurance checks during the close of rolls period for several electoral events
- conducted the 2015 Sample Audit Fieldwork event.

The Electoral Integrity Framework

The EIU developed the [Electoral Integrity Framework](#), which is published on the AEC website. A key document for the AEC, the framework was developed to inform program and operational policy development, support policy assessment and enable the systematic and consistent measurement of electoral integrity.

The Framework is guided by the AEC's values of electoral integrity through professionalism, quality and agility. It is a way for the AEC staff working on elections and enrolment activities to ensure every task is consistent with electoral integrity, as every task matters.

The Framework explicitly acknowledges that the AEC must not only be capable and operate with quality and agility but it must also demonstrate that it is operating with high integrity and continuous improvement in indicators of electoral integrity.

Focusing on enrolment and elections, the Electoral Integrity Framework has three components:

1. four elements of electoral integrity (accuracy, completeness, entitlement and capability)
2. principles that give effect to the elements in two of the AEC's program outcomes – enrolment and elections
3. indicators that serve as a way of measuring how well the AEC meets each of the principles.

Future work of the Electoral Integrity Unit

In addition to progressing a range of enrolment-related projects, the EIU will continue to identify areas for review and assessment, and respond to organisational priorities as they arise.

