

# CONFERENCE OF COMMONWEALTH CHIEF ELECTION OFFICERS, QUEENS' COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, 23-26 MARCH 1998

## Introduction

This paper sets out the views of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) on a number of the issues to be dealt with at the Conference. The first substantive session on the agenda - "Overview: Voting for Democracy" - appears to have been designed to facilitate a very broad discussion, and for that reason is not addressed explicitly below.

Against all but the last agenda item, comments are made under two different sub-headings: "Australian Federal Practice", and "Important Issues". In some cases the latter sub-heading covers what are currently important issues in Australia; in other cases, it covers what are seen as important issues internationally.

## What Kind of Election Management Body?

### Australian Federal Practice

The AEC was established in 1984. Its responsibilities under law include conducting all federal elections and referendums; maintaining a national electoral register; reporting to the Government on electoral matters; promoting public awareness of electoral and Parliamentary matters through the conduct of education and information programs; providing information and advice on electoral matters to the Parliament, the Government, Departments and authorities of the Commonwealth; conducting and promoting research into electoral matters and other matters that relate to its functions; publishing material on matters that relate to its functions; providing electoral assistance to foreign countries; and conducting certain labour union and other non-parliamentary elections.

The three-member Commission which sits at the peak of the structure consists of a Chairperson, the Electoral Commissioner, and one other member, the so-called "non-judicial appointee". The Chairperson and the non-judicial appointee serve part-time, and the Electoral Commissioner serves full-time. The Chairperson is required to be a judge or a retired judge of the Federal Court of Australia. Since 1984, the position of non-judicial appointee has invariably been held either by a current or former Australian Statistician (although this is not a legal requirement). The Electoral Commissioner is the chief executive officer of the AEC, and has all the powers of a Secretary of a Department under *the Public Service Act 1922*. Commissioners can be removed from their positions only in the most limited circumstances.

It is made clear in *the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* that it is the intention of the Parliament that the AEC should be an independent and political neutral body. The manner in which the AEC is required to perform its day-to-day functions is set out in *the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. *The AEC* is not subject to governmental or ministerial direction in the performance of its functions. The AEC is however required to provide the responsible Minister with an Annual Report on its general operations and, following each general election or Senate election, a report on the operation at that election of the funding and disclosure provisions of *the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1915*. It may also provide other reports on the operation of the funding and disclosure provisions. These reports are required to be presented by the Minister to the Parliament.

*The Freedom of Information Act 1952* applies to papers, documents and records held by the AEC. Such materials, unless specifically exempted, are required to be made available in response to a valid application under the Act.

The AEC's administrative practices are subject to judicial or quasi-judicial review under a number of different statutes. *The Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* enables the result of an election to be challenged

in the High Court of Australia, sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns. Certain administrative decisions made by AEC officers are subject to review under *the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977*. Other administrative decisions are, pursuant to explicit provisions in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, reviewable under *the Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975*. The Ombudsman also has jurisdiction to examine the AEC's handling of certain issues.

The most public form of accountability of the AEC arises from its relationship with the Joint **Standing** Committee on Electoral Matters of the Commonwealth Parliament. The Committee has served most valuably as a forum in which issues can be explored in depth, common ground can be sought, and partisan differences can be narrowed. Since 1983 the Committee has conducted numerous inquiries into aspects of the electoral process, including the conduct of the 1984, 1987, 1990, 1993 and 1996 elections; the costs of political advertising; the participation of women in the electoral process; and prospects for Commonwealth-State cooperation in the electoral area. The AEC has worked closely with the Committee in support of its activities over a long period.

Funding is provided to the AEC for the performance of its functions as part of the normal annual budget of the Government. Funds in the budget are appropriated by legislation passed by the Parliament each year. Additional funds are provided for the conduct of elections.

*The Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* also contains provisions which effect so-called "standing appropriations" which provide funds for certain recurrent activities without the need for further approval by Parliament. Section 92 of the Act provides funds for the conduct of electoral roll reviews; section 302 appropriates funds for the making of payments to certain political parties in reimbursement of their election campaign expenditures.

Apart from its Central Office, the AEC has a Head Office in the capital city of each State and the Northern Territory, and a Divisional Office in or near each of the 148 electoral Divisions into which the country is divided.

### Important issues

One significant issue is the importance of financial control: while the law may suggest that it is intended that an Electoral Commission will be independent of government, under the Westminster system and those based on it, financial initiative is frequently left with the executive Government. This may open the way for direct influence by the Government of decisions which on the face of them are to be made by the Commission.

A second issue is that of the extent of legal protection of independence. In some countries, provision for an Electoral Commission is made in the Constitution; in others provision is made by ordinary statute. In cases where the Constitution may be amended by ordinary statute, it may not matter greatly which approach has been adopted. But where a special restrictive process is required for amendment of the Constitution, significantly greater independence will be given to the Electoral Commission by making provision for it in the Constitution.

A third issue is that of the sorts of responsibilities which are given to the Electoral Commission. There will often be a temptation to give an Electoral Commission the function of resolving highly politically charged questions on which' political groups have been unable to agree (such as, for example, the control of advertising, or the allocation of State media resources among different parties). This is particularly likely to happen if a new Commission has been established in a transitional situation in response to distrust of pre-existing institutions. The danger in such a practice, however, is that if the issues are inherently incapable of objective resolution, all participants in the process may be dissatisfied with the approach the Commission has taken; and in the long run, the general credibility of the Commission may be compromised.

## **What Kind of Elections?**

### Australian Federal Practice

The House of Representatives of the Federal Parliament is elected using the alternative vote system in single-member constituencies, while the Senate is elected using a single transferable vote system of proportional representation, with each State, the Australian Capital Territory and the **Northern Territory** constituting single electorates for the election of Senators. The alternative vote system for the House was first used at a general election in 1919, while the single transferable vote system for the Senate was first used in 1949. Both are therefore well-established features of the Australian political system. The use of a proportional representation system for Senate elections has ensured that the voices of those who support minority parties and interests still have a chance of being heard, and that may well have tended to deflect criticism of the non-proportional voting system used for House of Representatives elections.

### Important Issues

While Australia has something of a reputation for experimentation in the electoral area, not all experiments have been successful. At the first election after self-government was granted to the Australian Capital Territory in 1989, the new Legislative Assembly was elected using a voting system known as modified d'Hondt. This was a hybrid system containing elements of both list proportional representation, and elements of preferential voting for both parties and candidates. Its main features reflected ill considered political compromises, rather than proper analysis of how it would work in practice. In fact it worked disastrously: the count took over two months, and the legitimacy of the Assembly elected under it was always regarded by the electorate as compromised.

While it is often tempting in a transitional situation to attempt to develop a compromise hybrid system, the AEC believes that such an approach entails great risks. Such systems usually lack logical coherence, in that there is no simple underlying principle governing their operation which specifies who deserves to be elected. Long established systems, on the other hand, tend to be well understood and basically sensible in their modes of operation, and this is a considerable virtue.

## **Getting the Register Right**

### Australian Federal Practice

Australia has a continuously maintained electoral register which is used for federal, State and local government elections. An elector registers by completing an electoral enrolment form, and returning it to the AEC. Persons eligible to register are obliged to do so, and persons already on the register who change address are required to advise the AEC of the change.

Electoral enrolment forms must be signed by a witness as well as by the claimant, before they can be accepted and processed. There is however currently no requirement for persons to provide identification documents when claiming registration, nor is there any requirement for voters to produce documentary evidence of identity when voting.

The Australian Joint Roll Council, which consists of representatives from the AEC and from the electoral administrations of Australia's States and self-governing Territories, meets regularly to discuss issues arising from the use of the common register for elections at all levels of government.

### Important issues

A major issue currently under consideration is that of whether stricter identification requirements should be imposed as part of the voter registration process. In its June 1997 Report on *The 1996*

*Federal Election*, the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters of the Federal Parliament recommended the introduction of such stricter requirements, and requested the AEC to prepare an implementation plan for them. That plan has now been provided to the Committee.

A second and related issue is that of what use can be made in updating the register of government data (federal, State and local) not originally obtained for electoral purposes. Historically such data has not been used in that way, and while there could well be efficiencies, cost savings and benefits in terms of an increased accuracy of the register to be obtained from adopting such an approach, there are also significant privacy policy issues to be addressed. This issue, again, is one that the AEC has been requested to examine by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

## **Preparations: The Devil's in the Detail**

### Australian Federal Practice

The fundamental constraints determining the AEC's approach to planning for an election are that an election may in principle be called at almost any time; that the period between the calling of the election and polling day may be as short as 33 days; and that the date for polling, once set, constitutes an immutable deadline.

In order to ensure that these constraints can be dealt with effectively, the AEC has adopted a number of inter-related measures. Although the statute under which federal elections are conducted, the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, is a highly detailed and prescriptive one, it has still been found desirable to produce comprehensive manuals for staff at all levels of the organisation (Central Office, State Head Offices, Divisional Offices, and polling places) which elaborate on the election-related tasks which have to be performed. 'Detailed pre-election and post-election timetables have also been developed over a long period, to ensure that tasks are undertaken in a coordinated way. Extensive use is made of integrated computer systems for roll management and election management. Finally, staff receive thorough training in the use of those systems, and more generally, in the tasks which they are expected to perform.

### Important Issues

The AEC has noted that, particularly in transitional situations, there is something of a tendency for the importance of project planning to be overlooked; and problems which have arisen in a number of elections in different parts of the world can be attributed to such a failing. In some cases, this flows from a distaste for comprehensive planning by the 'election administrators themselves, but another important factor is a disinclination on the part of decision-makers at the political level to treat practical problems as being real and serious.

Given the similarity of election procedures in many countries, the AEC believes that project planning is one area in which international cooperation and pooling of knowledge has the potential to be beneficial.

## **Civil Society and the Electoral Process**

### Australian Federal Practice

Australia has a free and open press, and it is subject to relatively little regulation during an election period. There are certain requirements relating primarily to the identification of the authors of election material which are administered by the AEC, but the AEC does not have a broader obligation to ensure political equity in press advertising, or in the coverage given to the campaigns of the various candidates and parties.

Political broadcasting is similarly not subject to extensive regulation. Responsibility for administering the relevant laws rests not with the AEC, but with the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

The AEC does however have an Information Section, the main task of which is to provide the public with information on the mechanics of the election process. Its work involves extensive contact with the media.

Political parties are not obliged to register with the AEC. A political party which chooses so to register, however, is eligible to receive government funding in support of its election campaign expenses; to have its name printed on the ballot paper adjacent to the name of its endorsed candidate; and to receive certain enrolment information. A registered party also has certain obligations, an important one of which is to make an annual disclosure of its financial affairs. The administration of these various provisions gives rise to extensive contact between the AEC and officials of the various political parties.

Candidates are entitled to deploy agents (“scrutineers”) to represent them at the polling and the counting of votes. Candidates normally make extensive use of that entitlement, and for that reason it has never been the practice of NGOs or other elements of civil society in Australia to seek to deploy separate independent election observers.

### Important Issues

As the one of the most important measures of the validity of an electoral process is the extent to which it is accepted as legitimate by the community in which it takes place, and as such acceptance flows to a large extent from the transparency with which the process is pursued, the AEC believes that mechanisms for enhancing such transparency, including the provision of an appropriate role for the media, political parties and candidates, and other elements of civil society, are worthy of careful consideration.

## **The Voter and the Electoral Process**

### Australian Federal Practice

Paragraph 7(1)(c) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* 1915 provides that one of the functions of the AEC is “to promote public awareness of electoral and Parliamentary matters by means of the conduct of education and information programs and by other means”. The AEC has Information and Education Sections which manage the programs in question. While a number of other government bodies are involved directly or indirectly in the promotion of education relating to civic affairs and government, the AEC is the only body which has a mandate related specifically to the electoral process.

The AEC undertakes special activities devoted to assisting Australians from a non-English speaking background, including the following.

The AEC’s national advertising campaign at election time costs approximately \$6m. A total of 9.2% of the total planned media expenditure is in ethnic media outlets. In particular, 8% of the press media budget, 26% of the radio media budget and 2% of the television media budget is planned to be spent in ethnic media. The fact that many ethnic language newspapers are published only once a week - in some cases even less frequently - means that it is not always possible to meet their deadlines for an advertisement to appear during the week preceding the close of the rolls.

All the AEC’s election advertisements are translated into community languages. In press, the AEC’s material is translated into 18 languages and appears in 4-3 separate ethnic community

publications. In radio, material is presented in 20 languages throughout the community radio networks. In television, material is supplied to the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), and also to Chinese and Italian Pay TV stations.

The AEC has already contributed a program to the on-going SBS series, *For Your Information*, which covers enrolment and voting procedures. The program is screened in sixteen languages.

The AEC's householder leaflet, which is delivered to all Australian residences and which provides information on pre-poll and postal voting, and on the correct way to fill in the House of Representatives and Senate ballot papers, and on other matters, contains translation panels into 11 languages, and reference to the availability of the Translating and Interpreter Service should further help be needed.

- In addition to the general leaflet, the AEC distributes an additional flyer to four divisions in New South Wales that have both a high incidence of informal voting and a high non-English speaking voting population. The leaflet contains an exact replica of the relevant House of Representatives ballot paper and also information on the Senate ballot paper.

The AEC uses public relations activities to publicise its enrolment activities at citizenship ceremonies, and to maximise media coverage of information appropriate to all relevant communities.

Electoral divisions with high populations of voters from non-English speaking backgrounds make special efforts to employ multilingual polling staff from the relevant communities.

One message stressed in all communications with electors from a non-English speaking background is the facility for them to receive assistance with the filling out of ballot papers on the basis of their having insufficient grasp on the English language.

AEC Information and Education Officers have increased their liaison with the Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) and with ethnic organisations, and have provided resources for electoral education.

- Cross-cultural awareness training for staff in all States has been provided.

### Important Issues

One of the greatest challenges in this area is to ensure that the methods of communication adopted reflect modern trends in the dissemination of information. Australia for example has seen an extensive growth in the use of the Internet in recent years, and the AEC has responded to this by making increasing use of its Home Page on the World Wide Web to provide information. Detailed election statistics are now provided on CD-ROM, rather than in hard copy format.

### **The Cost of Elections**

#### Australian Federal Practice

The last Australian federal election, held in March 1996, cost AU\$55.54 million, excluding payments made to political parties. Of that cost, 47.7% represented divisional office costs, including payment of polling officials and hire of premises; 13.3% represented advertising costs; 6.0% represented the cost of forms and equipment; 3.7% represented ballot paper production and printing costs; and 3.6% represented the cost of training polling officials.

The Australian Electoral Commission has effected major savings in election costs over the last 15 years, with the real cost per voter now being much lower than in 1984. Strategies which have been adopted include purchase of materials in bulk to take advantage of economies of scale in production; the use of structured planning for elections; the allocation of resources according to clearly defined formulae based on demonstrated needs, using an automated system for financial forecasting; and the conduct of post-election reviews to identify areas where the potential exists for the achievement of further efficiencies.

### Important Issues

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With budgets contracting world-wide, the conduct of elections in the most efficient manner possible has become a matter of priority to most if not all election administrators. The AEC believes that the area is one in which international cooperation, and comparison of best practices, can be most beneficial. The AEC played a role in initiating, and has strongly supported, the joint project on the Administration and Cost of Elections being sponsored by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the United Nations, and the International Foundation for Election Systems.

### **Training and Technology**

#### Australian Federal Practice

As elections are by their very nature highly decentralised operations employing large numbers of people, effective training mechanisms are crucial in ensuring that the process is undertaken to the highest standards. At the announcement of an election, Divisional Returning Officers in each electoral division have responsibility for recruiting and training polling officials. The AEC has developed a comprehensive training package for polling officials which includes videos, workbooks and practical exercises. Some polling officials are also required to attend face to face presentations conducted by the Divisional Returning Officer. At the 1996 election, 31,000 polling officials attended face to face training; 35,450 training videos were produced; and 185,210 workbooks were printed.

While computer systems are not used at polling booths in Australia, they play a major role in the day-to-day work of the AEC's permanent staff. Major systems include those used for the maintenance of the electoral roll, for the management of preparations for the polling, for the compilation of election results, and for the scanning of lists of voters to identify non-voters and multiple voters. These have been developed and refined over a long period, and reflect specific features of Australian federal elections. Training in the use of the systems is normally arranged by those responsible for the areas of AEC activity which the systems support.

The AEC also makes use of off-the-shelf office automation products for word processing, spreadsheeting, electronic mail and the like. A recent Australian Government initiative will shortly lead to the "outsourcing" of the AEC's hardware, and office automation software, to private sector vendors, who will also be responsible for training staff in the use of the particular off-the-shelf packages which will be supplied.

### Important Issues

In relation to technology, it is notable that while many election administrations around the world devote significant resources to the development of systems and software, there has to date been little cooperation in that process; and even knowledge of what is done in the field around the world seems to be quite limited. This is somewhat surprising in relation to Commonwealth Countries, as there appear to be similarities in the procedures used in many of them, implying that the development and use of generic software could be a possibility.

This issue was discussed some years ago at the first meeting of the election management bodies of International IDEA in 1995. That meeting, at which a number of Commonwealth countries were represented, endorsed the possible development of a catalogue or library of election related software. The AEC understands, however, that to date this has not been pursued further. We believe that, given the costs involved in developing software from scratch, the possibility of international cooperation in this area is worthy of further consideration and support

## **Election Day**

### Australian Federal Practice

Australians have the opportunity to vote in a range of different ways. While the majority of voters still cast ordinary ballots straight into a ballot box at a polling booth within their own electoral division, other options available generally or to a prescribed class of persons include pre-poll or postal voting, both within and outside Australia; absent voting at polling booths in other electoral divisions; voting at mobile polling in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and remote areas; and even voting at Australian bases in Antarctica. The breadth of this range of options is motivated among other things by the need to provide easy access to voting facilities for a population which is obliged as well as entitled to vote. At the 1996 election, there were 7,865 ordinary polling places set up; 475 mobile polling teams deployed to nursing homes; 46 mobile teams deployed in remote areas; 22 mobile teams sent into prisons; 330 pre-poll voting centres set up; and 99 overseas voting facilities established. Some 36,700 cardboard ballot boxes were produced, as well as 136,000 cardboard voting screens.

After the close of the polls, counting takes place at polling booths across the country, and results are compiled using a nationwide computer system with over 440 terminals and printers connected. At the 1996 election some 82,500 transactions were put through the system on election night.

### Important Issues

As costs incurred on election day represent a very significant part of the overall election cost, one of the more important issues which the AEC faces is that of finding ways to minimise costs while maintaining quality of service. This issue was discussed earlier under the agenda item "Cost of Elections".

## **After the Event**

### Australian Federal Practice

A candidate, an elector, or the AEC itself, may dispute the validity of an election by a petition to the High Court of Australia sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns.

The Court of Disputed Returns sits as an open court and can inquire into breaches of the Act which may throw doubt on the validity of an election, and whether votes were improperly admitted or rejected, but it cannot inquire into the correctness of the electoral roll

The powers of the Court of Disputed Returns include: to declare that any person who was returned as elected was not duly elected; to declare any candidate duly elected who was not returned as elected; and to declare any election absolutely void. If an election is declared void, a new election is held.

If the Court of Disputed Returns finds that a candidate has committed or has attempted to commit bribery or undue influence, and that candidate has been elected, then the election will be declared void.

It should be noted that in Australia, challenges to the qualifications of candidates can only be raised, after the election, not before polling day. This is partly because certain of the provisions relating to qualifications of candidates are spelt out in the Constitution. This gives rise to a number of distinctive problems.

Under current Australian law, returning officers are not only not required to address the issue of a candidate's qualification; they are expressly precluded from addressing it. At the time this provision was inserted in the law, most of the relevant constitutional provisions had not been construed by the courts, and returning officers would have been in no position to make a judgement on the constitutional issues. Even now, when there have been some judicial pronouncements on the matter, it would still not, in the AEC's view, be reasonable in the circumstances to expect returning officers to make decisions on the qualifications of a candidate for office; let alone defend such decisions in a court case when they ought to be organising the election.

It would be possible to exclude returning officers from the process of making decisions on the issue of qualifications, but permit court challenges to a candidate's qualifications to be dealt with before the election, rather than only afterwards. It is however by no means clear to us that such an approach would be optimal. A candidate could well have his or her campaigning severely disrupted by the need to go to court to defend a challenge which ultimately turned out to be unsuccessful. In the meantime, the preparations for the election, such as the printing of ballot papers, could be seriously disrupted (since they would depend on the outcome of the challenge), and voters would certainly face a confusing state of affairs.

- Challenges based on the relevant constitutional provisions would not necessarily be able to be resolved with the sort of expedition which would be required to enable a reasonable election timetable to be adhered to. A particular complication in Australia is that where a case in a federal Court gives rise to an issue of constitutional interpretation, section 78B of the *Judiciary Act 1903* requires that the case not proceed until notice has been given to the Commonwealth and State Attorneys-General, and a reasonable time has elapsed from the giving of the notice to enable them to consider the question of intervention in the proceedings. This provision has been deemed desirable for wider reasons of legal policy.

### Important Issues

In some situations it has been thought desirable that an Electoral Commission itself should be the final arbiter of the validity of the election process. This might be though especially appropriate in transitional situations where the judiciary might be seen as associated with a former regime.

Where there is a genuinely independent judiciary, however, a benefit of providing for judicial review of the election process is that it builds confidence in the validity of the process, and moreover constitutes a discipline upon the election administration, which will have to be conscious that everything it does may potentially be examined in court.

### **Taking It From Here**

It is important at the outset to pay tribute to the pioneering role which the Commonwealth Secretariat played and continues to play in facilitating international cooperation in the electoral field. The Commonwealth was one of the first international organisations to undertake systematic election observation at the request of member States, and has followed that up with many other initiatives, including the provision of high quality technical assistance, the convening of workshops and conferences, and the preparation of landmark publications on best practice in the electoral area. The Commonwealth has been at the forefront of the emphasis which has developed since the end of the Cold

War on the importance of good governance, and on free and fair elections as a fundamental element of such governance.

That international development, however, is one which has now attracted the interest of a range of other organisations. Examples include the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the International Foundation for Election Systems, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Republican Institute, the Electoral Institute of South Africa, and the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network; but there are many others. The likely presence of observers at the Conference from a number of these bodies is both evidence of this trend, and a development to be welcomed.

A striking feature of a number of these bodies is that they have overlapping memberships. Most if not all members of the Commonwealth are also members of the UN, and are represented in the membership of the IPU. The Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance also have numerous Commonwealth members. Executive governments and electoral administrations in such States therefore often find themselves working cooperatively on electoral matters with, or under the auspices of, a number of regional and global bodies.

In the modern era of resource constraints this sort of diversity of activity immediately leads to scrutiny from those responsible for managing budgets, their concern being to ensure that national funds are expended in the most efficient and effective manner possible. In response to these sorts of concerns, there has been an increasing trend towards international cooperation, not only between the governments and authorities of States, but also between international governmental and non-governmental organisations active in the electoral field. This has been particularly marked in the area of election observation, where the potential clearly exists for the mounting of joint observation operations, such as that which was arranged in South Africa in 1994 by the Commonwealth, the United Nations, the Organization for African Unity and the European Union. Cooperation at the supranational level is also starting to occur, however, in technical areas, an example being the joint project being undertaken by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the United Nations, and the International Foundation for Election Systems, on the Administration and Cost of Elections.

The AEC strongly supports cooperation at both the national and supranational levels. Such cooperation will help to ensure that scarce resources are used optimally, but, more importantly, that work being done makes best use of the extensive expertise which exists internationally in a range of different fields. The high quality outputs from the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the skills of its officers, are of particular significance here, and deserve the widest possible audience.

For its part, the AEC has benefited greatly from the opportunity to work with its international counterparts. The AEC has undertaken or supported Commonwealth missions and projects in Bangladesh, Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zanzibar, and Vanuatu. AEC officers have also participated in UN missions in Namibia, Western Sahara, Cambodia, and Mozambique, and have been made available to serve with the UN in Eastern Slavonia. Missions under IFES auspices have been undertaken in Malawi and Liberia, and the AEC has attended conferences in Hungary, Uganda and the Philippines sponsored by the International Foundation for Election Systems. Finally; the AEC has taken part in a range of activities sponsored by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Participation in such projects enables officers to broaden their knowledge of electoral procedures in other parts of the world, and thereby has a direct benefit for Australia, as well as for the countries in-which missions are undertaken. The AEC's international activities have been strongly supported by successive Australian governments and Parliaments, and are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.