WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
Electoral Commission

Western Australian Electoral Commission

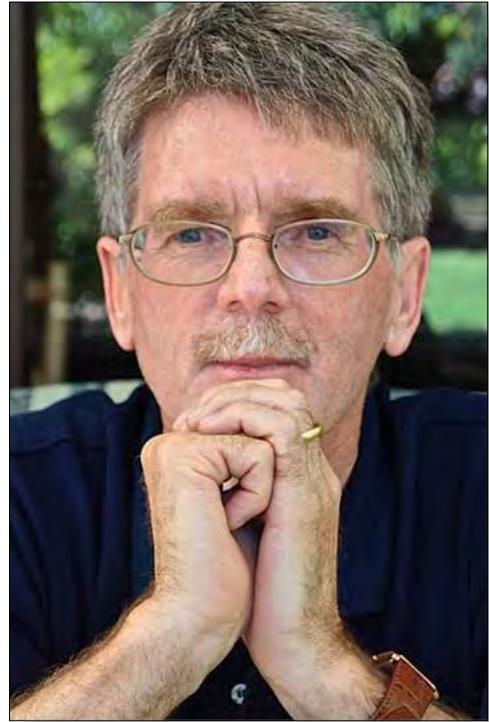# 2017 State General Election Election Report

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FOREWORD

The conduct of any major electoral event is a significant logistical challenge and the 2017 State election was no different. Following the amendment of State enrolment laws, almost 200,000 more Western Australians were eligible to vote than in the 2013 State election. The relaxation of early voting requirements contributed to a 166% increase in early voting in person. The election was conducted on substantially altered electoral boundaries. New rules enabled electors with a disability or incapacity to vote online.

The funding allocation for the election was $18.5 million which, while the same as for the 2013 election, constituted a significant reduction in real terms when CPI increases and the increased number of enrolled electors are taken into account. Operating within the allocated budget was both a major challenge and a significant achievement.

Staff at the Western Australian Electoral Commission rose to the occasion in response to these challenges and can be justifiably proud of their efforts. It is particularly pleasing also to be able to report a reduction in the level of informal voting.

I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the efforts of everyone who worked out in the field, our Returning Officers and the more than 7,000 election officials who assisted in polling places and early voting centres to ensure that all Western Australians could have their say, and the cooperation of the many candidates and political parties who contested the election. I extend my sincere thanks to one and all.

David Kerslake
Electoral Commissioner

This report should be read in conjunction with the companion report, *2017 Western Australian State General Election Results and Statistics*, which provides a detailed breakdown of election results for both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council.

David Kerslake
Electoral Commissioner
August 2017

ELECTION SNAPSHOT

Voters

1,593,222

Polling places

752

Electoral officials

8,305

Individual elections

59 Districts
6 Regions

Candidates nominated for Legislative Assembly

415

Candidates nominated for Legislative Council

302

2017 WA STATE GENERAL ELECTION TIMELINE

On 1 February 2017 the Governor of Western Australia issued the writs to proceed with elections for the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. Election Day was set for Saturday 11 March. The full election timetable is set out below.

FEBRUARY

Issue of the writs	Wednesday 1 February 2017
Nominations open	Thursday 2 February 2017
Applications for postal votes open	Thursday 2 February 2017
Close of party nominations	Thursday 9 February 2017
Roll close	Thursday 9 February 2017
Close of nominations	Friday 10 February 2017 (12 pm)
Draw for ballot paper positions	Friday 10 February 2017
Voting ticket lodgement	Monday 13 February 2017 (12 pm)
Early voting commences	Monday 20 February 2017
Postal voting commences	Monday 20 February 2017
Mobile polling commences	Saturday 25 February 2017

MARCH

Scrutiny of early votes may commence	Wednesday 8 March 2017 (8 am)
Postal vote applications close	Wednesday 8 March 2017 (6 pm)
Early voting closes	Friday 10 March 2017 (6 pm)
Polling day	Saturday March 11 2017 (8 am–6 pm)
Close of receipt of postal votes	Thursday 16 March 2017 (9 am)

ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT

There were significant changes in the electoral landscape compared with previous elections.

Electoral boundaries

In the lead up to the election the independent Electoral Distribution Commissioners altered the boundaries of all but eight of the State's lower house districts, abolished the rural district of Eyre and formed a new district named Baldivis in the South Metropolitan Region. Maps of all electoral districts and regions appear in the *2017 Western Australian State General Election Results and Statistics,* elections.wa.gov.au/elections/state/reports

Legislative changes

A range of electoral reforms enacted by the Western Australian Parliament in 2016 included:

Early voting in person

At past elections electors wishing to cast an early vote needed to declare that they belonged to one of a number of eligibility criteria specified in the Act. These eligibility requirements were abolished in 2016, giving all electors the right to vote early if they so wish.

Technology assisted voting

Technology assisted voting (predominantly using the Internet) was authorised for anyone with an incapacity or literacy limitation which would otherwise require them to seek assistance in filling out the ballot paper (and thus deny them a secret vote).

Direct enrolment

Where electors had not updated their address details or enrolled in the first place the Commission was authorised to do so on their behalf, using reliable data sources. This brought State enrolment rules into line with Federal requirements in place since 2012, substantially increasing the accuracy and completeness of the State roll.

Scrutineers

While endorsed candidates could still appoint their own scrutineers, they were also permitted to authorise their party to do so on their behalf. In practice, this enabled parties to nominate persons to scrutinise proceedings at the Commission's central count facility on behalf of all of their endorsed candidates.

Above and below the line voting in the Upper House

The format of the Upper House ballot paper was changed (by regulation) from 'side by side' to 'above and below the line', a similar format to the Senate ballot paper.

PARTICIPATION

Voting

Expressed as a proportion of the number of enrolled electors, voter participation at the 2017 State election was 86.9%, a reduction compared with 2013 (89.21%). However, taking into account the almost 200,000 increase in the number of enrolled electors, the number of actual voters was higher: 1,384,500 compared with 1,184,432 in 2013.[1]

A total of 1,593,222 electors were enrolled as at the Close of Rolls on 9 February 2017, an increase of 12.8% compared with the 2013 State election. The increase was primarily attributable to the passage of direct enrolment legislation in 2016.

Effective participation is measured not only by the number of voters, but by the proportion of votes actually admitted to the count, that is, the proportion of formal votes. The Commission made a concerted effort to reverse the recent upward trend in informal voting, resulting in a decrease from 6% (2013) to 4.5% for the Legislative Assembly and a small decrease also for the Legislative Council.

A total of 2,288 electors with disability participated independently and cast their vote in secret using the Commission's innovative internet voting system.

Enrolment

As at the close of rolls on 9 February 2017, a total of 1,593,222 electors were registered on the State electoral roll, a significant and very pleasing increase compared with the 1,412,533 electors eligible to vote at the 2013 election. The average number of electors was 27,813 for metropolitan Legislative Assembly districts and 24,830 for country districts, the largest number of electors in Swan Hills (32,573) and the smallest in North West Central (10,432).

Party registration

The following sixteen parties contested the 2017 election, nine more than at the previous general election. 2013. (Those marked with an * also contested the 2013 election.) A designated officer was responsible for ongoing liaison with political parties and the Electoral Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner met with officials from each party to brief them on relevant legislation and administrative arrangements.

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[1] Legislative Assembly

Registered Political Parties at 2017 State General Election

Political Party Name	Ballot Paper Abbreviation
Animal Justice Party	
Australian Christians (WA)*	Australian Christians
Australian Labor Party (Western Australian Branch)*	WA Labor
Daylight Saving Party	Daylight Saving Party
Family First Party WA*	Family First
Fluoride Free WA Party	FLUORIDE FREE WA
Julie Matheson for Western Australia	Julie Matheson for Western Australia
Liberal Democratic Party	Liberal Democrats
Micro Business Party	Micro Business Party
National Party of Australia (WA) Inc*	THE NATIONALS
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	Pauline Hanson's One Nation
Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party (WA)*	Shooters, Fishers and Farmers
Socialist Alliance WA	Socialist Alliance
The Flux Party – WA	Flux The System!
The Greens (WA) Inc*	The Greens (WA)
The Liberal Party of Australia (Western Australian Division) Inc*	Liberal Party

ELECTION PLANNING

Project management methodology

The Commission adopted project planning methodology as the basis for its election preparations, with 73 distinct election projects. All staff undertook a project management refresher course as well as risk management training. Every Commission officer was allocated at least one project, with progress monitored by the State Election Management Committee chaired by the Electoral Commissioner. A series of strategic workshops was held to plan and confirm election progress and an experienced election manager was contracted from outside the Commission to undertake an independent assessment of election readiness.

Recruitment and training

Returning Officers (RO) were appointed for each of the State's 59 Legislative Assembly districts and six Legislative Council regions. All RO's attended a one-day conference in November 2016, followed by a series of training workshops. Seven Returning Officer Liaison Officers were also appointed based on their vast electoral experience, to guide RO's on the various facets of election management.

Returning Officer Conference – November 2016

One of the Commission's biggest planning exercises involved the employment of over 7000 officials to assist in polling places and early voting centres. Pivotal to a successful outcome on Election Day, training videos were prepared outlining voting and counting procedures. Through an Australia-wide collaboration of electoral bodies, enough equipment was available to ensure that videos loaded on tablets were available for viewing by electoral officials in every polling place. While this 'on the job' training is not ideal, it is the best that can be planned under the resource and time constraints we face.

Systems Development

It is customary in the lead up to any major electoral event to undertake a thorough review of all election management systems. Necessary changes were planned and completed well ahead of the election, with a follow up system test conducted in the week prior to the Election Day.

One of the Commission's biggest challenges was the development of an internet voting system for eligible electors. With neither the time nor resources available to develop its own system, the Commission opted to use the New South Wales Electoral Commission's iVote system successfully deployed at the last two general elections in that State. Even so, a range of modifications needed to be made to take account of Western Australian legislation and to render the system compatible with the Commission's existing infrastructure. The enormity of the task in planning and preparing for internet voting, even for a smaller number of electors, should not be underestimated.

Ballot paper production

For this election the Commission adopted a new format, with the Legislative Assembly and Council ballot papers designed to be printed and distributed as conjoined papers separated by perforations, with electoral officials instructed to separate them at the point of issue. In addition to printing and distribution efficiencies, this format reduced the likelihood of electors being issued with incorrect ballot papers.

The Commission also developed revised procedures to enhance the security of ballot paper production, distribution and storage.

Printing of ballot papers

Polling place allocation

Utilising a Geographic Information System, proximity analysis for polling place selection was undertaken against mapped population, geographic and socio considerations such as growth, density, topography, boundaries and public amenities. This provided the WAEC with greatly enhanced strategic advice and guidance when determining polling place location, numbers and resource allocation, increasing value and efficiency provided to the community.

With the relaxation of eligibility criteria the Commission planned for a substantial increase in the level of early voting, consistent with recent trends in other jurisdictions. The total number of formal early votes cast in person – 214,242 (compared with 79,193 in 2013) – nevertheless exceeded the Commission's expectations.

Understandably, political parties were keen to know the proposed locations of early voting centres as soon as possible to assist with matters such as the rostering of volunteers. Unfortunately, however, owners of premises deemed suitable are generally reluctant to enter agreements much in advance of the election, when the Commission is only seeking a lease for several weeks and a better offer might come along in the meantime.

VOTER AND CANDIDATE SERVICES

Strategy and service commitments

At recent elections the Commission has published a *Strategy and Service Commitments Charter* outlining our key service commitments and performance measures. The 2017 publication, updated to take account of legislative changes, can be viewed on the Commission's website: elections.wa.gov.au/about-us/publications/strategy-and-service-commitments

Voting options

When all polling venues are added up (Election Day, early voting, special institutions and remote locations), the Commission made available over 1100 venues where Western Australians could cast their vote in-person.

Ordinary voting on Saturday 11 March was available at 752 polling places throughout the State, a marginal decrease compared with 2013. This included 5 drive-in polling places. In addition, 266 special institutions (mainly hospitals and nursing homes) and 72 remote polling locations were in operation.

The convenience of early voting for some electors was recognised in the decision to remove the legislative requirement for electors to provide a reason. Electors were entitled to vote early if that was their preference and could do so from Monday 20 February onwards, at any of 66 early voting centres within Western Australia, interstate and overseas.

Alternatively electors could opt to vote by post by submitting an application directly through the Commission's website, or by obtaining a form from an Australia Post office. Some delays in processing applications occurred as a result of the practice by some political parties to include applications forms in the material they sent to electors, with the reply paid envelope

in some cases addressed to the party rather than the Commission. The resultant delay in on-forwarding received applications to the Commission may well have inconvenienced some electors. Those electors registered as General Early Voters were automatically sent ballot papers.

The Commission undertook mobile polling at 266 special institutions, such as hospitals, nursing homes, aged care facilities and retirement homes, providing electors with an opportunity to vote without having to leave the premises. Only electors eligible for mobile polling could use this service. Mobile polling is not intended to be used by staff of institutions who could otherwise vote at a polling place.

People with disability

In choosing polling locations every effort was made to maximise accessibility for people with mobility issues. This is never easy, available locations having varying levels of disability access. Nevertheless, the Commission has an overall policy of having at least one accessible polling location per district. Polling place staff are also available to take ballot papers out to electors' cars and most polling places had reserved parking bays within close proximity of the polling place entrance.

Technology-assisted voting (online or telephone) was available for the first time for anyone who could not vote without assistance because they:

• have insufficient literacy skills;

• are blind or sight impaired; or

• are otherwise incapacitated.

Electors were required to register and declare their eligibility, with registration open for four weeks prior to polling day. They could self-register through the WAEC website or

with operator assistance by calling the iVote Helpdesk. Once registered users could vote anytime between 8.00 a.m. 20 February (the same date that early voting commenced) and 6.00pm 11 March 2017. The online and telephone interfaces were created in consultation with disability groups and specialists to be responsive and simple to navigate, and were compatible with a range of screen reader software.

After an elector had submitted their vote, they could use the telephone verification service to confirm their vote had been captured correctly for inclusion in the count. Voting closed at 6.00pm Saturday 11 March.

Services to CaLD Electors

In the lead up to this election the Commission consulted widely with peak bodies and individuals representing various Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) elector groups on how their needs might be better serviced. A number of initiatives and service delivery changes were made as a result.

One such initiative was a trial program involving the engagement and training of over 30 Electoral Ambassadors from various ethnic and different language speaking communities to become an information resource within their community. Following attendance at paid training workshops, these Ambassadors were provided with a range of resource materials written in either 'Easy English' or 25 of the most commonly spoken languages in Western Australia. In addition, most of the program participants were also employed on Election Day as Electoral Information Officers at polling places that had a known concentration of electors from a particular language group or had previously recorded high levels of informality.

A booklet outlining in three easy steps the importance of enrolling and voting was mailed to households in areas with large CALD populations. Every polling place and early voting centre was also supplied with tablet devices loaded with multi-lingual voting instructions. These were used primarily by information officers and queue controllers. These initiatives contributed to a reduction in informality rate in districts with high CALD populations.

The Commission also advertised in ethnic media and through paid Facebook posts in the 26 most used languages in WA.
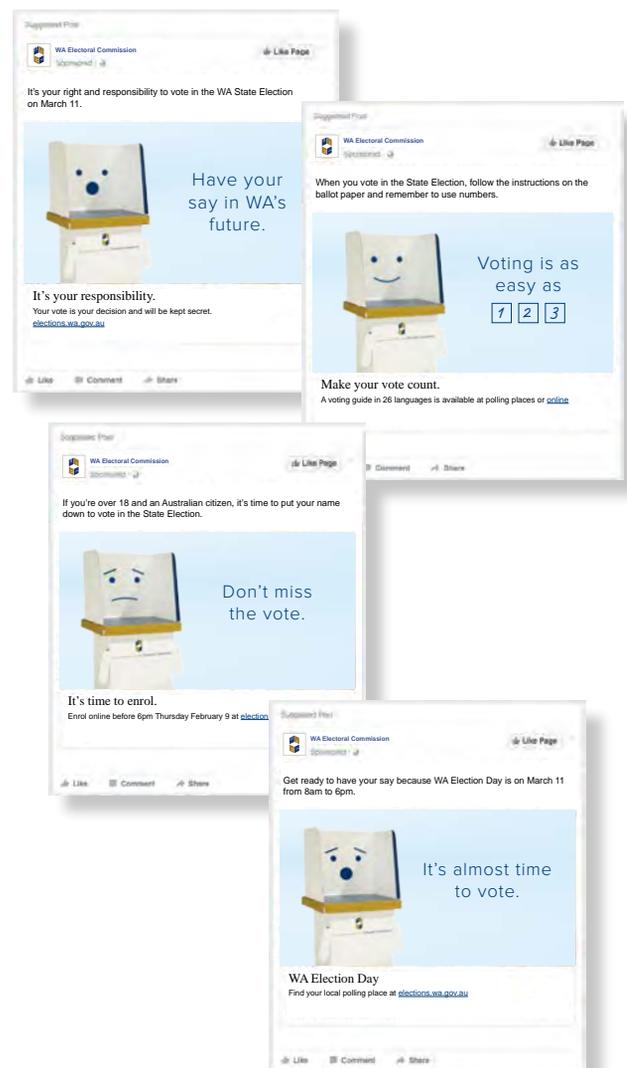
Facebook posts in easy English

Indigenous electors

The Commission's regional advertising also included a number of Indigenous radio stations.

Commission staff also worked in tandem with the Australian Electoral Commission's Indigenous Electoral Participation Program to promote enrolment and voting in indigenous communities, with visits to communities timed for the lead up to the State election. Crocmedia radio designed a regional strategy to cut-through in regional and rural areas in WA and educate people living in these areas about the importance of voting.

The Commission also conducted remote polling service at 72 locations.

Younger electors

Electors aged between 18 and 30 have been prominent among the absentees at recent democratic elections not just in Australia but throughout the world. The Commission opted to undertake different advertising campaigns, one aimed at the overall population and one directed specifically to younger electors.

This two-pronged approach proved to be highly successful. One campaign set out to engage purposely with the youth vote on their terms in their environment, to debunk the myth that voting is no big deal. The Commission's 'Dark Lord' advertising campaign specifically targeted this group. Given that younger audiences are light consumers of traditional media, greater emphasis was placed on cinema and social media advertising. In the months leading up to the election, popular regional drive-time radio programs such as Sportsday WA and Off the Bench WA were also used to deliver key messaging, enlisting AFL talent and other key role models to promote the importance of voting.

A selection of cinema, social media, TVC, website banner, mobile advertising

Call Centre

The State election call centre was commissioned to provide electors with advice and support on election matters and to assist people to participate fully in the election process. Stellar Asia Pacific was the business partner chosen to deliver this important service to electors. Voting and enrolment were the most common queries received by the call centre.

It commenced Wednesday 1 February 2017 and operated Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 5.00 pm until Thursday March 16 2017. Supplementary days of operation were provided Monday 6 March 2017, Labour Day public holiday; Saturday 11 March 2017, Polling Day; and Sunday 12 March 2017.

28,323 calls were received by the call centre which was 23% less than in 2013. The reduction in calls can be attributed to the call centre operating for a shorter operating period than in 2013, which in turn made allowance for electors increasingly sourcing information from the Commission's website.

Political Party and Candidate Liaison

An information package was provided to all political parties registered in Western Australia, containing electoral boundary maps, outlining the nominations process and outlining requirements for financial disclosure and authorisation of election material. Briefing sessions were also conducted by Returning Officers at the close of nominations.

Media Liaison

An election media guide was produced to address questions commonly asked by journalists, as well as providing useful statistical information. The Electoral Commissioner was readily available for media interviews to promote awareness of different facets of the election.

Call Centre

THE ELECTION

Nominations

Nominations opened on 2 February 2017 and closed at 12 noon on 10 February 2017. For the Legislative Assembly nominations increased from 291 to 415, an average of seven candidates per district. Darling Range had the largest number of nominations (10) and Vasse the smallest (4). The number of Legislative Council candidates was 302 (an average of 50 per region) compared with a total of 165 in 2013.

Legislative Assembly Nominations
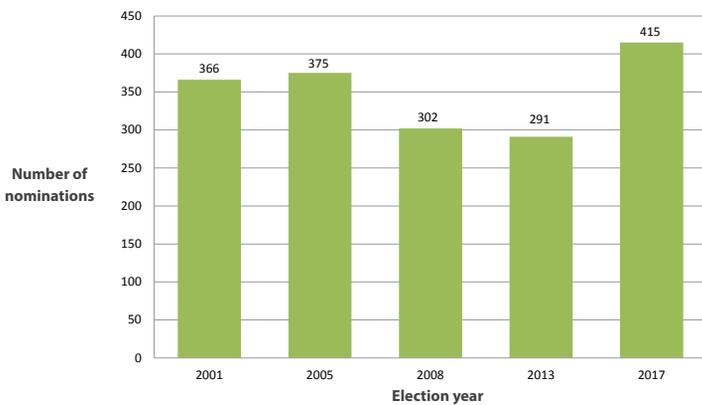
Legislative Council Nominations
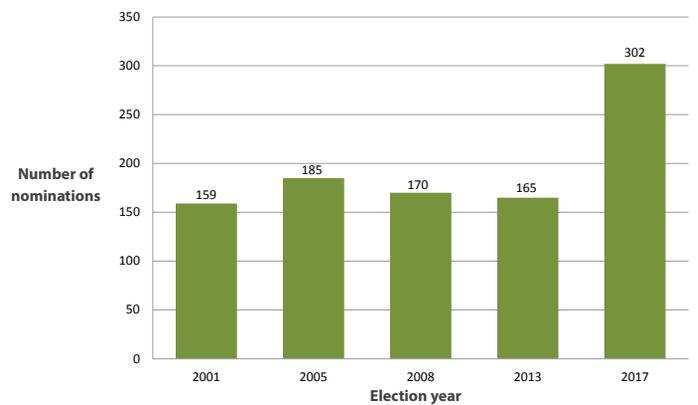
At 29%, the proportion of female candidates was slightly lower than 2013 (33%).

Legislative Assembly : Candidate Gender
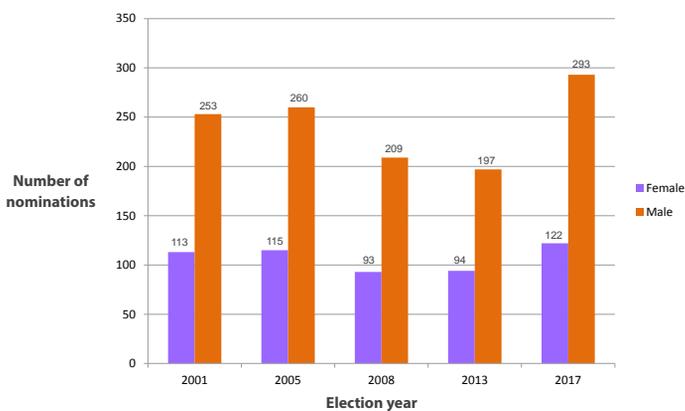
Legislative Council : Candidate Gender
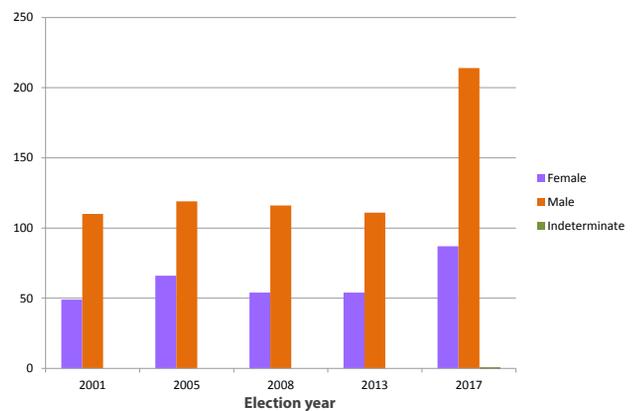
The average age of Legislative Assembly candidates was 48, the youngest being 18 years of age and the oldest 75. For the Legislative Council the average was 46, the youngest 18 and the oldest 81.

Political party representation

620 candidates represented 16 registered political parties at this election, compared to 387 candidates representing seven registered political parties at the 2013 election.

Political Party representation 2001–2017

| Party	2001	2005	2008	2013	2017
Number of political parties	7	14	10	7	16
Animal Justice Party					14
Australian Christians[1]	18	69	58	54	57
Citizens Electoral Council		13	21		
Community 1st		1			
Daylight Saving Party (2008)[2]			5		
Daylight Saving Party (current)[2]					12
Democrats	50	12			
Family First		44	45	28	15
FLUORIDE FREE WA					12
Flux The System!					24
Forest Liberal		12			
Fremantle Hospital Support Group		2			
Julie Matheson for Western Australia					32
Liberal Democrats					15
Liberal Party	88	84	92	93	92
Micro Business Party					60
New Country Party		12	3		
One Nation	69	58	6		
Pauline Hanson's One Nation					52
Public Hospital Support Group		12			
Shooters, Fishers and Farmers[3]				12	35
Socialist Alliance					4
The Greens (WA)	65	70	73	74	74
THE NATIONALS	23	20	29	31	32
WA Labor	90	90	93	95	90
Independent	96	50	44	61	94
No designated affiliation	26	11	3	8	3
TOTALS	**525**	**560**	**472**	**456**	**717**

[1] Party name was the Christian Democratic Party until the 2013 election.

[2] Although these two parties have the same party name, they are not the same party administratively.

[3] Party name was Shooters and Fishers prior to this 2017 election.

Legislative Council Voting Tickets

A voting ticket is a statement of a particular order of candidate preferences, provided by a party, group or candidate in a Legislative Council election. An elector may opt for a ticket vote, thereby voting in accordance with these preferences.

All groups and all but one candidate lodged a voting ticket in 2017, with a total of 126 voting ticket claims made across all six Legislative Council Regions. In 2017 over 95 per cent of electors cast a ticket vote.

A complete list of voting tickets for all regions was published in The West Australian and was made available on the Commission's website.

2017 Legislative Council Voting Ticket Lodgement by Region and Percentage of Ticket Voting

Region	Registered Political Parties	Groups	Ungrouped Candidates	Total for Region	% Ticket Votes Cast by Electors
East Metropolitan	14	4	1	19	95.44%
North Metropolitan	14	2	3	19	94.62%
South Metropolitan	15	5	5	25	96.10%
Agricultural	14	5	2	21	95.34%
Mining & Pastoral	14	6	2	22	96.34%
South West	15	2	3	20	95.54%
Totals	**86**	**24**	**16**	**126**	

Complete list of voting tickets for all regions was published in The West Australian

Ballot paper production

The Commission produced 3,651,250 ballot papers for this election. As all ballot papers were conjoined (on the same sheet but separated by a perforation) for this election there was an equal number of ballot papers produced for the Assembly and Council.

Changes to ballot paper regulations allowed this to occur as the Council ballot paper is now a similar landscape design to that used for the Senate in Federal elections.

Conjoined ballot papers separated by perforations

The conjoined ballot papers meant that each Assembly and Council was on the same sheet meaning that ballot papers could not be issued for districts without the correct matching region. To further reduce the possibility of incorrect ballot papers being issued, all ballot papers were colour-coded by region. Six distinctive colours were chosen to differentiate each of the metropolitan and country regions.

Legislation removing the need for electors to provide a reason to cast an early vote meant that any elector could cast a vote at any early location in the three-week period prior to Election Day. While the overall estimates in relation to the anticipated increase were close to the mark at a State-wide level, the significant challenge was to identify where those people were going to vote to make sure that there were enough ballot papers at those locations. As with past elections, a number of locations needed additional papers as it became clearer where voters from particular districts were voting. However, with the significant increase in early voting the extent of those transfers was magnified.

Similarly, with changes to electoral boundaries occurring after every election, there was an expectation that there would be an increase in electors casting absent votes where they chose to continue to vote at the same location as last election, albeit that it was now in a different district. In a significant number of locations on Election Day the number of electors crossing boundaries to vote at other polling places was greater than expected and additional ballot papers needed to be delivered to those locations during the day.

Overall, the total number of ballot papers produced was high enough to service the number of electors, the challenge was the distribution of those ballot papers across locations. Ensuring more ballot papers are issued for various districts in quantities anticipated to meet local needs for early and absent voting will be a focus for the next election.

Voting

A total of 1,384,500 electors voted in the election, 87% of those registered on the electoral roll. Although this was a decrease compared with 2013 (89.2%), the actual number of participants was greater as a result of a more complete electoral roll with the introduction of direct enrolment.

Among younger electors, 87.9% of 18−19 year olds voted, but the rate fell away for 20−24 (79.65%) and 25−29 (77.75%) year olds, reflecting the continued challenge of getting younger electors to remain engaged with the electoral and political system.

The overall rate of informal voting was higher for the Legislative Assembly, at 4.5%, compared with the much lower rate of 2.7% for the Legislative Council. This is a reflection of the differences in voting systems, with electors required to cast preferences for all candidates on Legislative Assembly ballot papers, whereas for the Legislative Council the vast majority of electors opt to mark a single box 'above the line'.

The highest rate of informal voting for the Legislative Assembly was in Mirrabooka at 8.54%, related to the high level of ethnic diversity in that district, but this was still a pleasing reduction compared with 2013. The Commission's elector awareness strategies will continue to focus on areas that have high proportions of residents who are not proficient in English.

Postal voting

A total of 111,761 postal votes received were admitted to the count, compared with 74,493 in 2013. Even when allowance is made for growth in the overall number of electors, this was a substantial increase.

One of the influencing factors was the increased postal vote activity by political parties. The Commission continues to be concerned about the level of confusion when electors receive unsolicited postal vote application forms through the mail. It may not be clear that an accompanying reply paid envelope is in fact addressed to a political party rather than the Commission. The two step delivery process can also delay the forwarding of ballot material to the electors concerned.

Prior to the election the Electoral Commissioner wrote to all political parties reminding them of their statutory obligation to forward any applications immediately, but unfortunately delays still occurred, resulting in numerous calls to the Commission's Call Centre from electors whose applications we had yet to receive. While involvement by political parties in this way is lawful it can inconvenience some electors, especially if they need to vote by a particular date because, for example, they are soon to embark on overseas travel.

Early voting in person

There was a 166% increase in early voting in person at this election, partly as a result of the removal of legislative eligibility requirements and also reflecting modern lifestyles and employment patterns.

The increase in the number of early voting centres to cater for this increase, although beneficial to electors, did place an added strain on the resources of candidates and political parties, especially smaller parties and independent candidates with limited numbers of volunteers.

In some instances property owners would only make their premises available for early voting on the proviso that party workers were not present and therefore would not interfere with the flow of other customers. To assist parties in this regard, the Commission agreed to set up tables inside voting centres where how to vote material could be left, but it was incumbent on parties to deliver their material to each centre. In future the Commission proposes to accept delivery of campaign material at one central location and distribute it to each voting location.

Allocation of Polling Locations 2013–2017

|	2013	2017
Ordinary	785	752
Special Instutions	249	266
Remote	87	72
Total	1121	1090
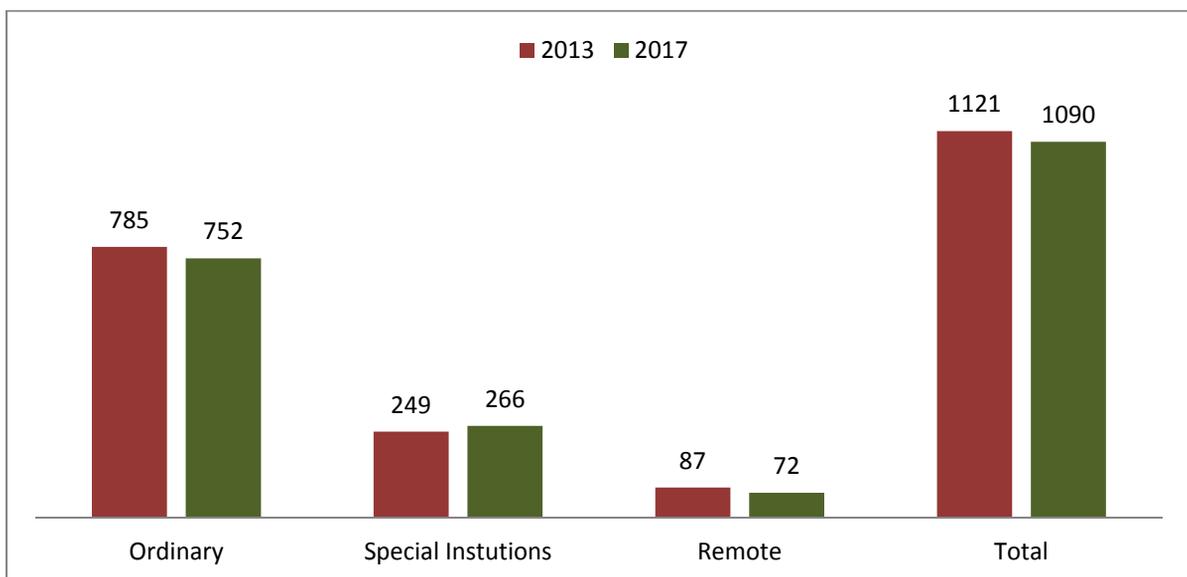
Technology assisted voting

A total of 2,431 registrations were received and 2,288 votes were taken using the Commission's innovative   internet voting system, available to assist electors with disability to cast a secret vote. 54 electors used the telephone verification service to confirm the vote that they had cast.

Votes were transmitted using sophisticated encryption techniques and stored in randomised order to ensure that each vote could not be linked to the individual elector. Physical vote records for the Legislative Assembly were conveyed to the Commission's central Count Centre to be included with the count of early votes, while for the Legislative Council a data file was produced for import into the computerised counting system (CountWA).

The age range of iVote users was between 19 and 94 years of age and the response from electors who accessed iVote to cast a secret ballot for the first time was extremely positive. Electors cited the convenience of being able to vote where and when they chose as one of the most important factors. A second common comment received was for the need to have the iVote eligibility criteria expanded, to include remote, overseas and general early voter electors at future elections.
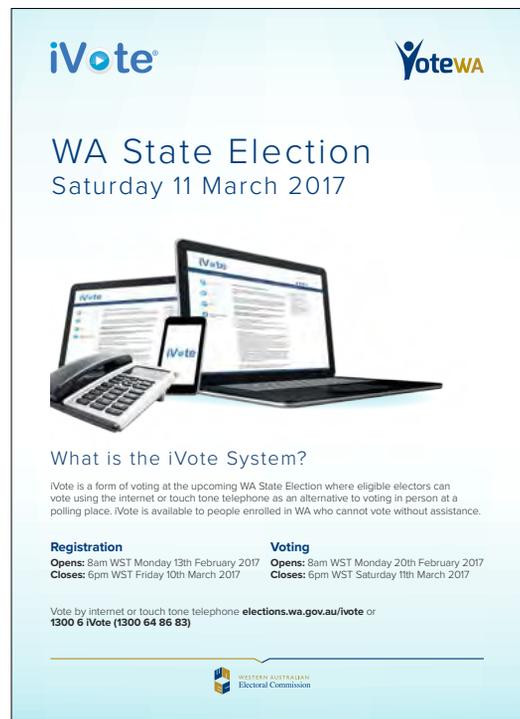
iVote poster
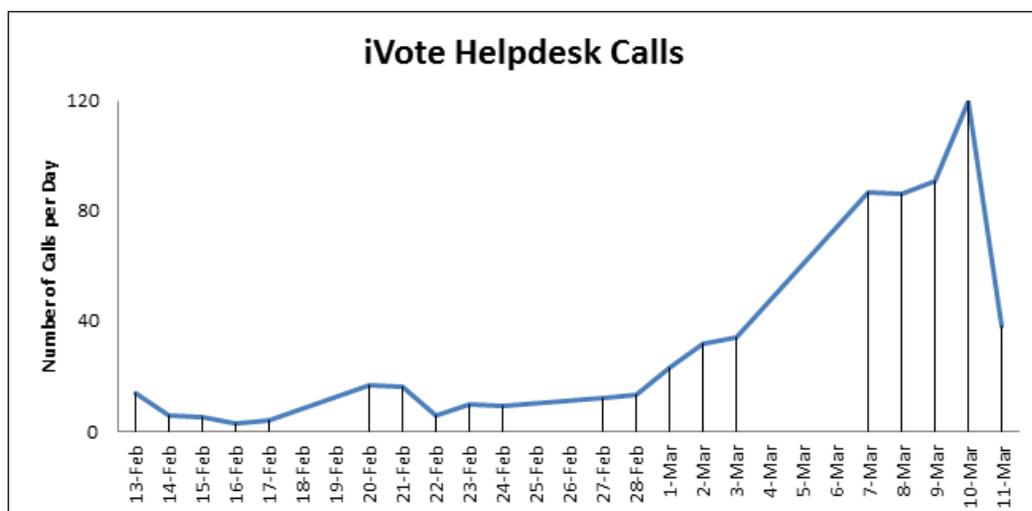
RESULTS

Centralised Results Reporting

The Commission established a centralised counting centre where all early votes and postal votes were counted on election night and from where the flow of results from polling places were monitored. Results were then disseminated directly to the public via the Commission's dedicated election website and to certain media organisations that had arranged direct data feeds of the results. ABC Television for example hosted a comprehensive televised election night special from their studios, utilising a regularly updated data feed from the Commission.

Election Night Results Transmission

Progressive first preference results for the Legislative Assembly, notional distribution of preferences and first preference results for the Legislative Council were transmitted directly to the results team by Returning Officers, using an encrypted remote connection to the Commission's results system. First preference results and notional distribution of preference results for early and postal votes were also input into the results system from the centralised counting centre. Contingency provisions were put in place in the event that Returning Officers experienced connectivity and/or transmission problems on the night.

A new secure on-line portal was created as part of the Commission's election management system (EMSWA) to allow Returning Officers to input all results directly. This enabled a more seamless integration of results and direct data feeds to media organisations. Returning Officers directly entered their results with no reportable operational deficiencies observed.

Results Website

The Commission launched a completely re-engineered website specifically designed for the March 2017 election, that acted as a virtual tally room. The website provided results in real-time over the course of the evening and enabled interested members of the public, media organisations and candidates to view the same results information that was previously only available at the tally room.

The website was linked to EMSWA, providing results updates every two minutes on election night and every hour in the following days until each seat was declared. Additional information was also available on the website, including close seats, enrolment details for each district and region, an election time line, location of polling places, ticket vote preferences and candidate details.

Processing ballot papers

Legislative Assembly

Of the 59 Legislative Assembly electoral districts, 24 candidates were elected with an absolute majority of first preference votes.

The remaining 35 districts required a distribution of preferences to determine the final result.

Districts where candidate elected by Absolute Majority of First Preference Votes

Electoral District	Number of Candidates	Electoral District	Number of Candidates
Armadale	6	Mandurah	7
Bassendean	5	Mirrabooka	7
Bateman	7	Morley	6
Butler	8	Nedlands	6
Cannington	7	Rockingham	7
Carine	7	South Perth	7
Churchlands	7	Swan Hills	6
Cockburn	7	Thornlie	8
Cottesloe	8	Victoria Park	5
Fremantle	8	Warnbro	7
Girrawheen	7	West Swan	6
Kwinana	6	Willagee	6

### Districts where candidate elected following a Distribution of Preferences

Electoral District	Number of Candidates	Number of Distributions	Electoral District	Number of Candidates	Number of Distributions
Albany	6	3	Kimberley	8	5
Balcatta	6	4	Kingsley	6	4
Baldivis	9	5	Maylands	6	1
Belmont	8	3	Midland	7	2
Bicton	7	5	Moore	7	5
Bunbury	8	5	Mount Lawley	6	4
Burns Beach	7	5	Murray-Wellington	7	5
Central Wheatbelt	8	4	North West Central	8	6
Collie-Preston	8	3	Perth	8	6
Darling Range	10	7	Pilbara	8	6
Dawesville	9	7	Riverton	7	4
Forrestfield	7	4	Roe	8	5
Geraldton	8	6	Scarborough	7	4
Hillarys	5	3	Southern River	8	4
Jandakot	7	5	Vasse	4	2
Joondalup	8	6	Wanneroo	8	5
Kalamunda	7	5	Warren-Blackwood	6	4
Kalgoorlie	7	5			

A total of 24 new members were elected to the Legislative Assembly.

Total Votes Counted

The number of votes accepted for the 2017 election increased by 9.89% when compared with the 2013 election.

**Total Votes Legislative Assembly 2005–2017**
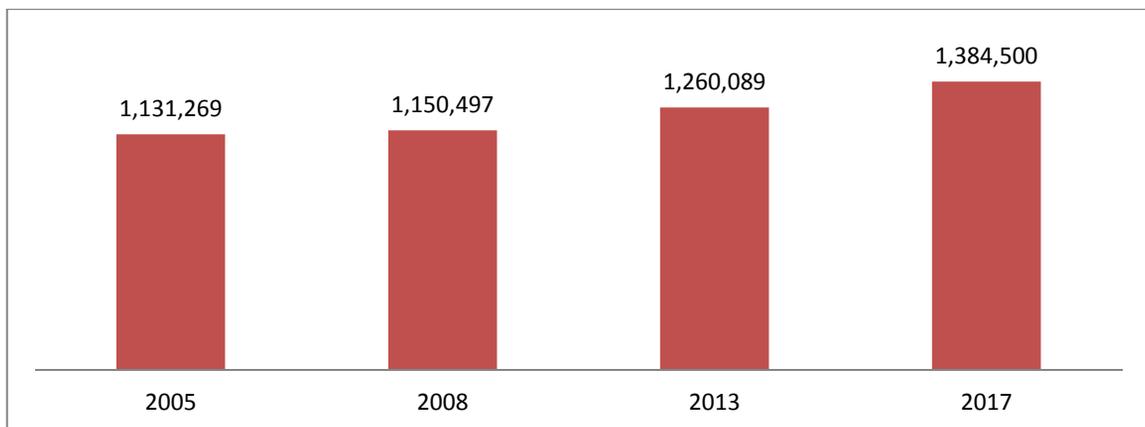
Ballot Paper Formality

Ballot papers that are blank, do not show preferences in accordance with instructions and/or legislative requirements, or do not make the voter's intention clear, are classified as informal. A ballot paper is also regarded as informal if the voter can be identified through a marking on it. Informal ballot papers do not contribute to the election of a candidate and are not included in calculating the quota or absolute majority required for election.

The percentage of informal votes for the Legislative Assembly in the 2017 election was 4.5%, an impressive decrease from the 2013 figure of 6%. This decrease was the product of dedicated efforts to reduce informality through better-focused community education, improved instructions on ballot papers and voting screens and the development of a CALD Ambassador program focused on supporting electors in communities from different cultural backgrounds where English was often not the first language.

Legislative Assembly Informality Levels 2005–2017
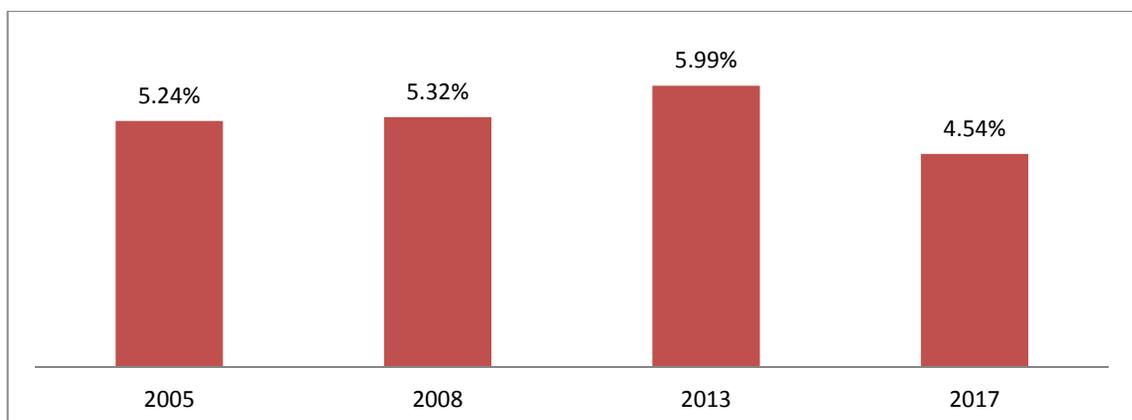
Almost 45% of informal ballot papers were blank or only contained scribble, suggesting a level of deliberate action on the part of the elector. 36% of ballot papers were marked with only a one or a tick, suggesting some ongoing confusion about the full preferential system in place in Western Australian State elections.

Legislative Assembly
Statewide Informal Ballot Categories 2017

Category	Count
Blank	19,892
Scribble	7,847
Elector Identified	191
Incorrect District	621
Number 1 only marked	17,666
Tick only marked	5,129
Marked with X and others numbered	1,184
No first preference	2,876
More than one box left blank	4,593
Other	2,861
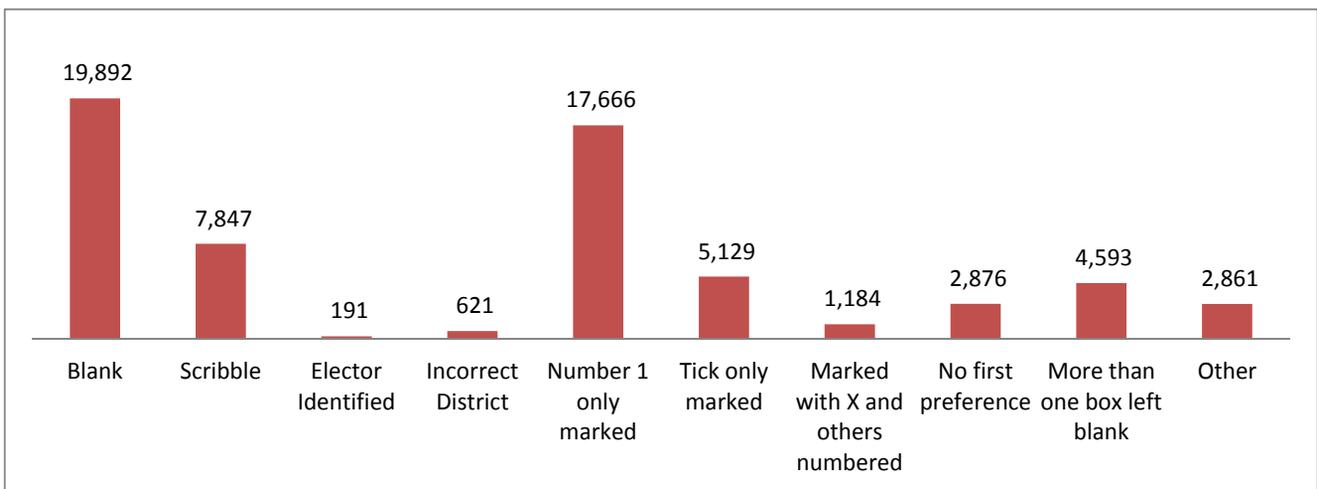
Counting Legislative Assembly ballot papers

Legislative Council

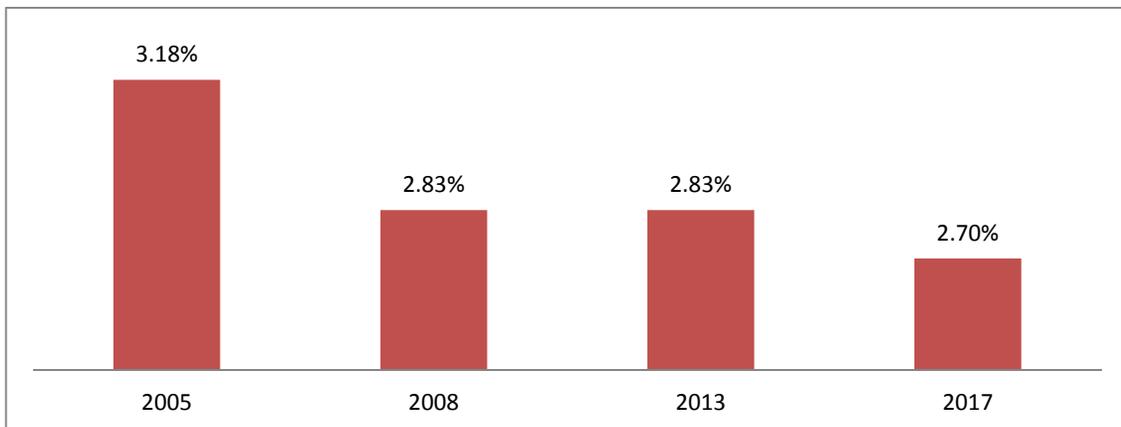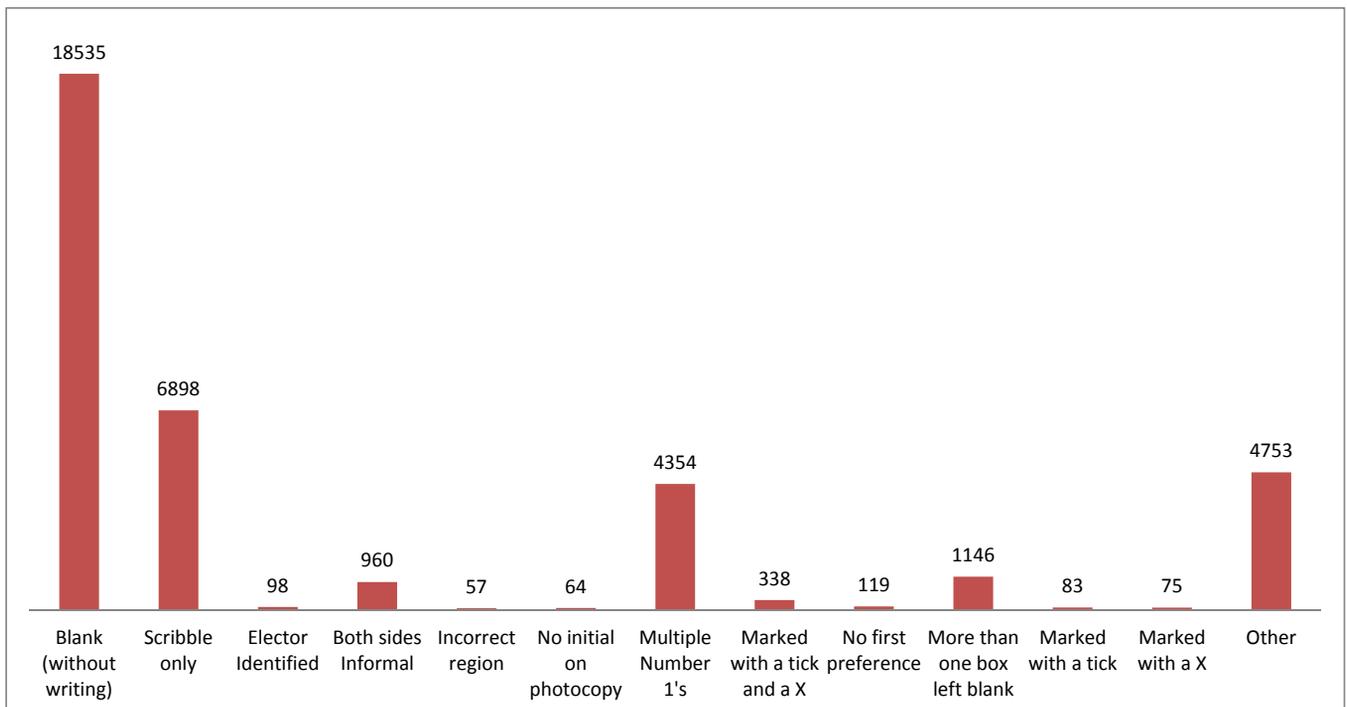In line with the improvements that resulted in a lower informal vote in the Assembly, informality in the Legislative Council also declined, dropping from 2.83% at the last two elections to 2.7% in 2017.

Legislative Council Informality Levels 2005–2017

	2005	2008	2013	2017
	3.18%	2.83%	2.83%	2.70%

State-wide Breakdown of Legislative Council Informal Ballot Papers Cast at the 2017 State Election

Blank (without writing)	Scribble only	Elector Identified	Both sides Informal	Incorrect region	No initial on photocopy	Multiple Number 1's	Marked with a tick and a X	No first preference	More than one box left blank	Marked with a tick	Marked with a X	Other
18535	6898	98	960	57	64	4354	338	119	1146	83	75	4753

A closer analysis of the informal ballot papers reveals that almost half of all informal ballot papers in the Legislative Council were blank. This is despite a single 1 above the line being a valid vote in the Legislative Council. 18% of ballot papers informal were due to scribble. Together, these figures suggest that almost two-thirds of informal ballot papers cast for the Legislative Council were intentional.

POST ELECTION PROCEDURES

Return of the Writ

On the 20 April 2017, the Electoral Commissioner returned the writs to the Governor and advised the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and the Clerk of the Legislative Council of the names of the elected members and gave each of them a copy of the relevant certified writ.

Apparent non-voters and multiple voters

Certified lists used at polling places to mark electors off the roll are scanned and the data used to produce a consolidated record of electors who voted in the election. From this information it is possible to identify any electors who appear not to have voted or whose name has been marked off more than once. Most cases of apparent dual voting occur where the wrong elector was marked off the roll in error, which can easily happen in a busy polling place (one elector is marked off twice and an elector immediately above or below them on the certified list is not marked off at all). This is confirmed by cross-referencing the scanned data against 'non-voter' responses.

There was no evidence of any concerted attempt at multiple voting at this election. Apart from official error, the most common explanation for the casting of a second vote was forgetfulness on the part of some older electors (voting on Election Day with other family members, overlooking the fact that they had already voted when an electoral official visited their nursing home), or voting a second time on Election Day out of concern that their postal votes would not arrive on time.

Political finance

Under Part VI of the Electoral Act, all political parties, associated entities, candidates, Legislative Council groups and other persons are required to provide the Electoral Commissioner with details of gifts received and expenditure incurred for electoral purposes.

General information regarding financial disclosure was included in the candidate guides produced for Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council candidates. More specific information was provided in the *Funding and Disclosure in Western Australia Guidelines.*

Agents

All political parties must have a party agent, who acts on behalf of the party and party nominated candidates with respect to financial disclosure. A party nominated candidate can nominate an agent, other than the party agent, to meet their financial disclosure obligations. Independent candidates and Legislative Council groups may appoint an agent or otherwise remain responsible for lodging their own return. Those wishing to appoint an agent must do so before 6pm on the day before polling day.

Party and candidate liaison

Candidate briefings were conducted for interested political parties, and the Commission held pre-election meetings with representatives from each of the 16 registered political parties. Independent candidates received the relevant election information in their candidate packs, from the Commission's website or by contacting the Commission's Electoral Liaison Officer.

The Commission also released a series of election bulletins which were posted on the Commission's website and were emailed to Independent candidates that had provided an email address, as well as nominated political party contacts.

Election-related disclosure

Political parties are required to disclose electoral expenditure incurred during the election period. Candidates and Legislative Council groups are required to disclose all gifts received and electoral expenditure incurred during the relevant disclosure period for their circumstances, which is determined by whether they had previously contested an election.

Persons other than political parties, associated entities, candidates and Legislative Council groups, who incur expenditure for political purposes are required to disclose all gifts received and expenditure incurred during the disclosure period for the election. If the total amount of expenditure does not exceed $500, a return is not required.

Election returns were due within 15 weeks after polling day which was Monday, 26 June 2017. These returns are publicly available 19 weeks after polling day (Monday, 24 July 2017), and can be viewed on the Commission's website at www.elections.wa.gov.au.

Annual disclosure

All political parties and associated entities are required to lodge a return annually by 30 November, disclosing all gifts, gifts in kind and other income received for the preceding financial year. Copies of all returns received may be viewed online at www.elections.wa.gov.au.

Public funding

Candidates who receive a minimum of 4% of formal first preference votes in an election are eligible to submit a claim for the reimbursement of electoral expenditure, and in doing so are entitled to be paid a maximum of $1.869934 for each vote received. Registered political parties,

whose candidates achieve 4% on a State-wide basis, are also entitled to the reimbursement of electoral expenditure for all of their candidates based on the same calculation.

Funding is not automatically provided to either candidates or political parties; they must first provide evidence of incurring electoral expenditure. The amount payable to the candidate or party is the lesser of the entitlement per vote and the total expenditure actually incurred. Eligible candidates and political parties have up until 20 weeks after polling day (Monday, 31 July 2017) to lodge a claim for public funding.

Resource allocation

The State election was conducted at a cost of approximately $18.5 million, within the allocated budget. This was a major achievement, given that there was no increase on the 2013 election allocation but a substantial increased (over 10%) in the CPI over the intervening period.

The main resource areas utilised during the election.

Staffing (including contract staff)	$11,180,401
Communication	$1,328,854
Advertising	$1,313,422
Travel and Accommodation	$1,261,952
Contracts and Consumables	$2,272,613
Other Expenses	$1,142,758
TOTAL	**$15,500,000**

State Election 2017

- Staffing (including contract staff) — 61%
- Communication — 7%
- Advertising — 7%
- Travel and Accommodation — 7%
- Contracts and Consumables — 12%
- Other Expenses — 6%
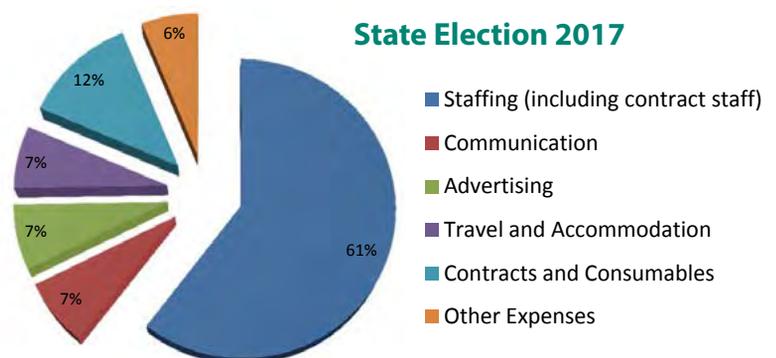
Cost saving initiatives

The Commission introduced many cost saving initiatives to ensure that those increased costs that could not be avoided were managed within funding limitations. This was achieved by improved systems and procedures without forgoing effectiveness:

• Limiting the increase in the salary of polling place staff and count centre casuals

• Reducing the need for printing materials and Australia Post

• Confining media advertising to areas of greatest effectiveness

• Developing more effective and less costly computer systems

• Greater use of electronic systems in human resources business processes.

Staffing

The staffing cost relates to the employment of the following:

District Returning Officers	59
Region Returning Officers	6
Polling Staff	6,990
Count Centre contractors	1,216
Other contract staff	20

iVote funding

The challenge of remaining within budget was exacerbated with the passage of legislation to provide technology assisted voting for people with disability, but the absence of any funding allocation to meet that need. The development of internet voting system was funded from within the Commission's recurrent budget at a cost of $673,000 and with the invaluable assistance of the NSW Electoral Commission.

Election day at the polling place

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Key performance indicators

The following key performance indicators were specifically developed as a means for the Commission and interested stakeholders to evaluate organisational performance in the delivery of the 2017 State General Election.

Election Preparations

Indicator	Measure	Target	Actuals	Notes
Every Returning Officer completes online training and attends face to face training	% of the total number	100%	100%	
Every Polling Place Manager completes online training	% of the total number	100%	Est. 97%	Further appointments required due to some last minute staff withdrawals, plus internet access or coverage issues in some more remote locations
Polling places and early voting centres receive their full allocation of election materials on time	% of the total number	100%	Est. 99%	Some early voting centres did not receive their complete issue of voting screens and signage prior to the commencement of early voting
Every electoral district roll is produced and available for distribution to Returning Officers within 10 days of roll close	100% by specific date	100% by 19 February 2017	100%	
All early voting centres are open and ready to operate from Monday 20 February	100% by specific date	100% by 20 February 2017	100%	

Election Preparations

Indicator	Measure	Target	Actuals	Notes
Percentage of Legislative Assembly first preference count results received from ordinary polling places by 8.00 pm on polling day	% of the total number (747)	70%	54.5%	77.2% by 8.30pm and 84.7% by 9.00pm. The large number of parties and candidates on ballot papers at this election contributed to slower counts than in 2013
All complaints received or formal election enquiries are responded to or acknowledged within 24 hours or by the next business day	% of the total number	100%	98.4%	9 of 573 received not responded to within 24 hrs
All advertised polling places are open and ready for polling at 8.00 am and remain open until 6.00 pm on polling day	% of the total number	100%	100%	
Return of the Writs	Returned by due date specified	By date on the Writ 2 May 2017	Yes	The Writs were returned to the Governor on 20 April 2017

Election Outcomes

Indicator	Measure	Target	Actuals	Notes
Average State-wide elector participation rate – i.e. % of eligible electors on the roll	% of the total eligible	91%	Est. 92.6%	This figure is derived from the AEC's estimate of the number of eligible Western Australians as at the 2017 March quarter. The introduction of direct enrolment has improved the participation rate
Elector participation rate for 18–24 year olds equals or betters the national target of 80%	% of the total eligible	80%	Est. 83.5%	This figure is derived from the AEC's estimate of the number of eligible Western Australians as at the 2017 March quarter. The introduction of direct enrolment has improved the participation rate
Average State-wide voter turn-out – i.e. % of those on the roll who vote	% of the total enrolled	91%	86.9%	A decrease of 2.3% over the 2013 State general election. Some electors who were directly enrolled may not have voted.
Informality rate – Legislative Assembly	% of votes cast (2013 – 5.99%)	4%	4.5%	Figures ranged from 2.98% in Bicton to 8.54% in Mirrabooka (down from 9.96 in 2013)
Informality rate – Legislative Council	% of votes cast (2013 – 2.83%)	2%	2.74%	Marginally lower than the 2013 figure
The number of invalidity complaints stemming from WAEC processes that are upheld by a Court of Disputed Returns	Number of successful complaints (2013 – 0)	0	0	

Following the election, the Commission sourced feedback from all major stakeholders including electors, candidates, party agents, the media, election officials and returning officers. Both quantitative and qualitative feedback was gathered via telephone and online surveys, as well as face-to-face interviews.

For this election the survey included 1,200 electors from across the State, providing important feedback on the Commission's services and performance.

The latest survey was particularly useful in reinforcing how different age group cohorts sourced electoral information; identifying changing attitudes towards technologically assisted voted; and an insight into the effectiveness of the Commission's website and call centre.

The Commission also employed the services of a retired senior electoral official to review various aspects of performance, obtain feedback on a confidential basis from individual staff and conduct Election Day polling place visits.

The information obtained from all sources will be used to inform future election planning.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. A new Electoral Act

Western Australia's Electoral Act was originally drafted in 1907. Despite numerous amendments over the years, much of the statutory language is outmoded and the piece-meal nature of reforms has resulted in inconsistencies and difficulty of interpretation. A thorough overhaul of the legislation is long overdue.

The highly prescriptive nature of the current legislation also warrants further consideration. While basic standards and principles need to be enshrined in law, attempting to regulate every administrative aspect of an election can give rise to inflexibility. Re-drafting of the Electoral Act should be based on simple language and an agreed set of broad principles to provide the necessary degree of flexibility to enable practices and procedures to remain abreast of emergent issues and technology.

Recommendation 1:

That a comprehensive review of the Electoral Act be commenced at the earliest opportunity.

2. Broader eligibility for internet voting

At the 2017 State election Internet voting was available for people with a disability or incapacity, many of whom were able to vote in secret for the first time.

In the Commission's post-elections survey of iVote users a number of respondents commented on the desirability of expanding the system to include remote, overseas and general early voter electors at future elections. This is consistent with comments made by some Members of Parliament during passage of the legislation approving internet voting for people with disability. Indeed, during the

2017 State election the Commission had to charter helicopters to fly mobile polling teams in to some remote communities isolated by floods when Internet voting would have been a much cheaper option. Regard also needs to be given to increasing delivery times which, in remote areas particularly, make voting by post increasingly problematic, an emerging issue not only in parliamentary elections but also for the many local governments whose elections are conducted entirely by post.

Recommendation 2:

That Internet voting be made available at future WA parliamentary elections as an option for electors in remote areas and those absent from the State on Election Day.

Recommendation 3:

That a pilot program of Internet voting be trialled at future Local Government elections with the agreement of individual councils.

Remove the requirement for publication of certain details

Section 75 of the Act presently requires the Commission to publish particulars of the writ in a newspaper circulating in each region or district, 'or by placards or otherwise'. Sections 86(2b) and 87(7) likewise requires the publication of the names of candidates for both the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council.

With the advent of alternative, electronic means of communication these requirements are anachronistic and unnecessarily expensive.

Recommendation 4:

That the election publication requirements be satisfied by publishing required information on the Electoral Commission's website.

3. Payment of candidate deposits

Using modern technology all steps in the candidate nomination process can now be effected online, with the one exception of the payment of candidate deposits which the Act stipulates must be lodged in cash or by bank cheque. Allowing deposits to be lodged by electronic transfer would enable the entire nomination process to be completed online, greatly reducing the administrative burden on candidates, political parties and the Commission alike.

Recommendation 5:

That the Act be amended to provide the option of electronic transfer of funds for payment of candidate deposits.

4. Disclosure requirements for political parties registered at both State and Federal levels

Section 175N of the Act requires political parties to disclose all donations of $2,300 or more, except that for any party registered at both State and Federal levels submission of the Federal return is deemed to have met State disclosure requirements.

The current Federal threshold for the disclosure of donations is $13.200, well above the State threshold of $2300. This means that the amount that can be donated to a party with dual registration without disclosure is much higher than for a party with State-only registration. The result is an un-level playing field which should be remedied irrespective of other administrative considerations.

Recommendation 6:

That all registered political parties and associated entities should submit disclosure returns under a single set of rules.