Dear Sir,

The Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division) thanks the Electoral Matters Committee for its invitation to make a written submission concerning the conduct of the 2006 Victorian State Election and matters related thereto.

The Liberal Party considers that most aspects of the Election were conducted efficiently and professionally by the Commissioner and his staff. We have noted below areas where we consider the conduct of future Elections can be further enhanced. This includes proposed amendments to the Electoral Act 2002.

1. Early Voting Centres (“EVCs”)

The Liberal Party notes that there were 77 EVCs at the 2006 Election compared to 79 at the 2002 Election.

We also note that there was a 61% increase in the number of votes cast at EVCs at the 2006 Election compared to the 2002 Election. The votes cast at EVCs represented approximately 8.5% of all votes cast at the 2006 Election compared to 5.4% at the 2002 Election.

Given the substantial increase in the number of electors casting an early vote it is important that they are provided with at least one convenient location within their electorate to cast an early vote vote. Also, given that the dates of State Elections are now legislated it should be possible, with very few exceptions, to have at least one EVC in every District.

The Liberal Party therefore recommends that the VEC works to ensure that there is at least one EVC located in each of the 88 Districts.
2. Joint Voting Centres ("JVCs")

There were approximately 148 JVCs on Election Day.

We understand that the VEC bases its decision on whether to establish a JVC on whether there is a large number of Absent votes cast at a particular Voting Centre for a neighbouring District at the previous Election. The VEC advises that the threshold for establishing a JVC on this basis is 150 Absent votes. In addition, the VEC may also make a Voting Centre a JVC if it is extremely close to a District boundary.

We note that the Australian Electoral Commission ("AEC") announced in February 2007 that the Absent vote threshold for the creation of a JVC would be increased, for the next Federal Election, from 240 to 300 votes cast at a voting centre in the neighbouring Federal Division. This represented a 25% increase in the threshold and will result in a reduction of JVCs nationally from 228 to 177. Therefore the estimated number of JVCs proposed for the next Federal Election for the country will be only slightly greater than the number of JVCs used at the 2006 State Election.

While there is a sound justification for JVCs, there are also disadvantages and problems with JVCs. One concern raised with the Party is the confusion that JVCs may cause for electors. Electors at these JVCs are handed How to Vote cards which may have How to Vote information for 2 or 3 Districts and multiple Regions. (In at least one case there was a JVC which covered 3 Districts and 3 Regions, and therefore provided 6 How to Vote instructions on the one How to Vote card).

The Report of the Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2004 Federal Election was concerned about potential confusion for voters at JVCs, as well as a concern that “…widespread use of dual polling booths between adjoining seats is likely to give rise to the view that electors are able to vote in any booth, regardless of the seat in which they are enrolled.” The Committee concluded that:

“In order to minimise elector confusion and to maximise the advantages of dual polling booths, the Committee found a higher threshold than the current ought to apply to establish a dual polling place.”

The Liberal Party supports the use of JVCs. It, however, considers that the large number of JVCs, established with a modest threshold, complicated the voting process on Election Day. It therefore recommends that consideration should be given to increasing the threshold of Absent votes cast in a voting centre in a neighbouring District so as to decrease the number of JVCs at the 2010 Election.
3. Electoral Matter

The Liberal Party recommends that Section 83(3) of the *Electoral Act 2002* be amended so that a letter that bears the name and street address of the sender does not need to contain an authorised and printed by tag.

This exemption is presently provided for under Section 328(3)(c) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

The purpose of Section 83 of the *Electoral Act 2002* is to ensure that a person sending electoral material is clearly identifiable. Amending the Act to extend the exemption to letters that bear the name and street address of the sender will not dilute the practical intention of Section 83.

4. Mobile Voting Centres and How to Vote Cards

The Liberal Party recommends that Section 65 of the *Electoral Act 2002* be amended so that each elector at a mobile voting centre may request their own copies of the How to Vote cards.

At present electors are shown a folder with all the How to Vote cards provided by the political parties to the local election office. That is, electors do not receive their own How to Vote cards. The Party has received complaints that the manner in which the folder of How to Vote cards is presented to the voter compromises the electors’ right to a secret vote, as the How to Vote card in the folder that a voter may be following for completing their ballot paper may be clearly seen by election officials and hospital staff. If electors were able to request their own copies of the How to Vote cards they would be better able to discreetly complete their ballot paper from their set of How to Vote cards.
5. VEC Staff

The Liberal Party, its professional staff and its volunteers, found the VEC permanent staff at all levels on the whole to be very professional in the conduct of their duties.

There were, however, consistent concerns raised by Party members about temporary VEC staff not having a sufficient understanding of electoral laws or processes.

The Liberal Party recommends that the VEC contribute increased resources to the training and monitoring of temporary VEC staff at the next election.

Yours sincerely

Julian Sheezel
State Director