Our ref: 9434/9526

1 November 2007

Mr M. Roberts  
Executive Officer – Electoral Matters Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
Melbourne Vic 3000

Dear Mr Roberts,

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has noted additional submissions to the Electoral Matters Committee from:

1. Computing Research and Education Association of Australasia (CORE) regarding the security of electronic voting; and

2. Rhonda Joseph.

The following comments in response to some of the issues raised in these submissions are provided for the Committee’s consideration.

Computer Research and Education Association of Australia

The submission raises the suggestion that a voter-verifiable paper trail would be preferable because:

- it would remove the need for people to trust the software; and
- it provides a technique for resolving disputes should anyone question the accuracy of the machines.

It was suggested that a voter-verifiable paper trail would reduce concerns about:

- the fact that the voter must trust the programmers, hardware suppliers and auditors to not make mistakes either intentionally or accidentally; and
- the potential for hackers to run a program that recorded a vote differently to how the voter intended.

As CORE’s submission acknowledges, the concept of providing a paper print-out for vision impaired voters to verify their votes is of limited value. However, the VEC has concerns about providing a voter-verifiable print-out for other reasons too. Specifically, the VEC has concerns about the practicality of maintaining printers in a voting centre. Printers require regular changing of consumables and are particularly liable to breaking down and malfunctioning, leading to increased service requirements and possible delays to voting. It would also add to the time that voting takes and increase the costs. Additionally, there is the potential situation of a paper jam which must be fixed by an election official. Where this occurs, an election official may well have to intervene at a point in time when a vote is half-printed out, which may impact on the secrecy of the vote.
Given these factors, the VEC considers that, for it to introduce a paper print-out of ballots, these potential problems would have to be outweighed by a significant benefit. In the current environment, the VEC does not consider the concerns raised in CORE’s submission to be of such strength. With respect to trusting the software and keeping it free from hackers, the VEC’s concerns are mitigated by the following facts:

- the software was developed by a company with experience in writing software for electronic voting with particular expertise in the area of security and has a large number of security and accuracy-testing measures built in;
- the VEC conducted thousands of test cases on the software;
- copies of the software and the source code were provided to an independent expert auditor for examination; and
- the VEC kept the hardware under close scrutiny from its delivery through to the end of the election period, including not networking the computers and keeping them in Perspex cases sealed with numbered seals.

The VEC also notes that interference with the electronic voting system is punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment or a fine of up to 600 penalty units.

Whilst no system can be guaranteed to be without issues, the VEC considers that this is not an inappropriate level of security for the Victorian environment.

Rhonda Joseph

Ms Joseph raises a number of general concerns about access to voting services. The VEC has described in its Report to Parliament on the 2006 State Election, the arrangements that were put in place to address a range of access needs for voters. The VEC also raised in this report, concerns about the number of fully accessible voting centres that are available for use on election day. The VEC will continue to work to maximise access to voting services for all electors for future electoral events.

Finally, I have attached for the Committee’s information, a table that compares the number of candidates, vacancies and some critical timelines for State and Commonwealth elections in Victoria.

Yours sincerely

Steve Tully
Electoral Commissioner
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>State</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of Vacancies (Lower House)</td>
<td>37 (180 Australia wide)</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Vacancies (Upper House)</td>
<td>6 (40 Australia wide)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Period (Writ issue to Return of Writ)</td>
<td>100 days</td>
<td>46 days (45 days in 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of days between election day and return of writ (counting time)</td>
<td>67 days (62 days in this election)</td>
<td>21 days (20 in 2006)</td>
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</table>

Table demonstrates that the State Election in Victoria is a larger exercise than the Federal Election in Victoria and the State election is conducted in a more demanding time frame.