

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Report
2001 Postal Elections
May 2001

FOREWORD

The Western Australian Electoral Commission was enabled to conduct ordinary postal elections for local governments by the *Local Government Act 1995*. As an impartial State Government agency, the Electoral Commission assures integrity and impartiality in election management.

In 1995, the Electoral Commission conducted postal elections on a trial basis for 4 local governments. The Commission conducted postal elections for 8 local governments in 1997 and 34 local governments in 1999. On 5 May 2001, elections were conducted for 47 local governments, comprising 946,463 electors in 172 wards.

Of the 47 local governments which used postal voting in 2001, 16 used the postal voting method for the first time for their ordinary elections. The election of a Mayor by popular vote was held for 8 local governments and a referendum was held at the same time by the City of Joondalup.

When the in-person system was universally used, many electors were unaware that elections were taking place. The issue of a voting package to every elector also advertises the election and lets all electors know that they have the opportunity to vote.

The increase in the number of postal elections conducted in 2001 has created opportunities for more Commission staff to be involved in their planning and conduct. I acknowledge the efforts of staff involved in the election process and in addition, the assistance and cooperation provided by the staff of local governments during the conduct of these elections.

Of all the people who voted in the May 2001 local government elections, 89.4% voted in a postal election.



Dr K W Evans
ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER

7 December 2001

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995*, (the Act), the Electoral Commissioner is responsible for conducting postal elections. This assures complete impartiality in the electoral process.

The Electoral Commissioner was asked to conduct postal elections by 47 local governments for the 2001 Local Government elections. At the close of nominations, 45 districts proceeded to election. The election of a Mayor was conducted for 8 of these districts and one Referendum was conducted for the City of Joondalup. Sixteen districts conducted their ordinary elections as a postal election for the first time.

An election is conducted within an 80-day timetable prescribed by the Act. Legislative obligations are placed on both the Electoral Commissioner and the Local Governments. A copy of the timetable appears in Section 4 of the report.

The Electoral Commissioner is responsible for the appointment of Returning Officers. Returning Officers were appointed at the commencement of the election period and were given specific training in local government postal election procedures.

Under the Act, three statewide advertisements must be placed for a contested election:

- Enrolling to Vote
- Call for Nominations
- Notice of Election

Electoral advertising was coordinated with the Western Australian Municipal Association (WAMA). The Commission provided information for those local governments using the postal voting method. Some promotional advertising in *The West Australian* newspaper and community newspapers was also undertaken. Media releases were provided giving the opportunity to promote the elections, and many newspapers and radio stations used this material.

Regulations and guidelines for Returning Officers, candidates and scrutineers were set out in manuals produced for the elections, together with a guide to the formality rules for marking ballot papers.

The Western Australian Electoral Commission is responsible for the provision of residents' rolls to the Chief Executive Officer of all councils holding elections, whether the elections are postal or in-person.

Those local governments that conducted postal elections provided the Electoral Commissioner with a copy of their owners' and occupiers' rolls no later than 36 days before the election. The rolls were provided in a format that allowed the Commission to electronically merge owner/occupier data with data from the residents' roll. This combined data was screened for duplicate electors then used for the mail-out of packages to electors.

A total of 564 candidates nominated for 294 vacancies in 172 wards in 47 districts. At the close of nominations on 5 April 2001, there were 237 contested vacancies, 56 unopposed vacancies and 1 vacancy was unfilled.

508 candidates contested the 237 vacancies in 45 districts. There were 485 candidates for Councillor and 23 for Mayor. There were 229 contested vacancies for Councillor and 8 for Mayor.

Election packages comprised a ballot paper, a ballot paper envelope, a reply paid envelope, an information sheet and profiles of the candidates.

Each elector has a unique barcode that is printed on the ballot paper envelope and used to mark the elector off the roll. In all, 831,605 packages were despatched to Australia Post for delivery.

Staff from local government offices issued replacement and provisional packages. A total of 1841 replacement packages were issued for the 45 local governments conducting elections. Provisional packages were issued only if electors were omitted from the residents' or owner/occupiers' rolls. A total of 206 provisional packages were issued. In all 315,821 packages were returned by the close of the poll.

A Postal Vote Checking Centre was established in premises at Welshpool. All packages returned to the Commission were opened, checked and then scanned to mark each elector off the roll. Following scanning, the elector certificates were removed from the ballot paper envelopes, ensuring the identity of the electors could not be matched with the ballot papers. Subsequently, the ballot paper envelopes were opened, the ballot paper(s) removed without inspection and placed in a sealed ballot box, which could only be opened after 6.00pm on Election Day.

Ballot boxes containing the ballot papers were forwarded to local governments prior to and on Election Day. Counting of votes commenced from 6.00pm on Election Day, immediately after the close of the poll.

The *Local Government Act 1995* requires a polling place to be open on polling day. In the majority of cases, these were at the offices of the local government. These polling places acted as a receiving point for packages from electors and also issued replacement and provisional votes. Ballot boxes were delivered from Perth to each local government prior to and on Election Day.

Six country local governments in more remote areas of the State decided to have their count conducted at the Welshpool site as a cost saving measure. Counting for the other districts was carried out at the individual local government premises.

The first-past-the-post method is used for counting in local government elections. Where there are only one or two vacancies, votes are counted manually. With some multi-member vacancies, such as the Shire of Capel, where there were seventeen candidates for eleven vacancies, it was necessary to count the votes using a computer program.

The results of the count were recorded on a centralised computer system in Perth and forwarded to the Western Australian Municipal Association and the media via electronic mail.

The results were published on the Internet. They are reproduced at Appendix 10 and may be viewed at the Commission's website at www.waec.wa.gov.au.

The number of electors who return packages measures participation. The average participation rate in May 2001 was 38%. In May 1999, the average participation rate for contested postal elections was 42%. The average is not strictly comparable as different districts and elector numbers within districts were involved.

Of the total number of electors who voted, postal voters accounted for 89.4%. Thus, only 10.6% of local government voters actually voted at in-person elections in 2001.

7,353 packages were received after the close of the poll for the 45 local governments, an average of 0.88%. Whilst the percentage is not significant, it indicates that some electors are not aware of the time constraints regarding the return of postal voting packages. 16,804 packages were returned to the Commission as unclaimed mail, an average of 2.02% of all packages despatched. These addresses were referred to the Australian Electoral Commission or the local government (for owner/occupiers) so that appropriate action can be taken to correct the roll.

Local government elections are conducted on a cost-recovery basis, in accordance with the Act. The legislated cost recovery basis ensures that postal elections are conducted by a State Government agency at minimal cost.

In 2001, this was achieved by:

- competitive tendering for services provided;
- economies of scale in printing, postage and production of envelopes;
- centralising checking in the metropolitan area; and
- remote country local governments having the postal votes checked and counted in Perth.

In 1997, the average cost per elector was \$2.54. In 1999, the cost was \$2.31. In 2001, the average was \$2.40 (excluding GST).

Comparative Statistics 1999 and 2001 Local Government Postal Elections

Ordinary Elections	May 1999	May 2001
Local Government Districts	34	47
Enrolled electors	584,961	946,463
Referendums/Polls	3	1
Mayoral Elections		
Vacancies	8	8
Elected unopposed	1	0
Contested	7	8
Candidates	22	23
Wards		
Vacancies	130	172
Contested	82	129
Councillor Elections		
Vacancies	212	286
Elected unopposed	59	56
Contested	149	229
Candidates	352	485
Positions unfilled	0	1
Election Packages		
Despatched	478,808	831,605
Returned at close of poll	201,070	315,821
Turnout		
Range	33% to 77%	30% to 69%
Cost		
Total cost	\$1,105,000	\$2,306,510
Average cost per elector	\$2.31	\$2.40*

*Excludes GST.

Table 1: Comparative Statistics 1999 and 2001 Local Government Elections. Source: 66333

2 INTRODUCTION

The Western Australian Electoral Commission has had an increased role in the conduct of Local Government postal elections in recent years. The *City of Perth Restructuring Act 1993* and the *Local Government Act 1995* prescribe that the Electoral Commissioner conduct postal elections on behalf of local governments.

There must be initial agreement from the Electoral Commissioner and then approval by a special majority of council to conduct elections by the postal method. Any council may conduct its own in-person election or ask the Electoral Commissioner to conduct an in-person election on its behalf. The Act also provides for the conduct of polls or referendums in conjunction with ordinary elections.

From the initial four local governments having elections conducted in 1995, the Commission's involvement increased to 8 in 1997, 34 in 1999 and 47 in 2001.

In 2001, approximately 81% of local government electors in Western Australia were eligible participants in the postal voting method, with the majority in the metropolitan area.

Local governments in the metropolitan area which did not use the postal method in May 2001 included Cockburn (which had full elections in December 2000), South Perth (which is operating under Commissioners), Bayswater, East Fremantle, Fremantle, Mosman Park, and Peppermint Grove.

Local Governments, which participated in postal elections in 2001, are listed at Appendix 11. The Shires of Lake Grace and Mount Marshall did not proceed to an election in 2001 as insufficient nominations were received or vacancies were not contested.

Of the 47 local governments, 16 used the postal voting method for the first time for their ordinary elections. These were:

City of Canning	Shire of Gingin
Shire of Carnarvon	City of Gosnells
Town of Cottesloe	Shire of Greenough
Shire of Cue	City of Mandurah
Shire of Denmark	Shire of Mundaring
Shire of East Pilbara	City of Nedlands
Shire of Exmouth	Shire of Waroona
City of Geraldton	Shire of Yilgarn

The City of Joondalup and the City of Wanneroo used postal voting for the first time in December 2000 at their inaugural elections. In May 2001, both local governments continued to use postal voting for the ordinary elections.

This report provides a brief description of the processes involved in the conduct of these elections and includes a summary of the results.

3 INITIATIVES

Initiatives are introduced at each ordinary election to improve the service to local governments, ensure that the cost of conducting elections is as low as possible and that results are timely. For the May 2001 elections, the following initiatives were implemented:

3.1 Centralised Processing

The Commission decided to undertake postal vote checking at a central location in the metropolitan area to keep costs to a minimum for all districts.

Teams were put into place with responsibility for specific local governments. The approach sought to provide each local government with a personal service and a single point of contact on matters affecting the conduct of the election.

The economies of scale of centralised processes and facilities and the multi-skilling of staff resulted in cost savings particularly for the smaller councils, which would otherwise have had to bear individual administration costs.

3.2 Scanning Equipment

Each elector has a unique barcode that is scanned into a database. Skilled operators using hand held scanners can process between 40 and 50 barcodes per minute.

With a view to improving the scanning process, the Commission, in association with a barcode scanning company, developed a high speed scanning machine. An operator using this equipment is capable of scanning up to 100 barcodes per minute. Two high-speed scanners were used for this election.

3.3 Internet

The Commission upgraded its website before the 2001 elections to enable local governments and electors to obtain information about the election that the Commission was conducting and to get the results on the night of the poll.

4 ELECTION TIMETABLE

The timetable for local government elections is outlined in the *Local Government Act 1995*. Significant events in the election process are counted back in days from polling day, the first Saturday in May every two years. These dates are fixed, which aids planning and preparation. The dates for the Local Government Postal Elections are provided in the table below.

2001	Procedure	Section of the LG Act and Regulations
14 February	Last date for council to decide if the election is to be postal.	s.4.20(5), s.4.61(2)
14 February	Last date for Electoral Commissioner to be made responsible for the election.	s.4.20
24 February to 10 March	Chief Executive Officer of local government to give Statewide public notice of close of enrolments.	s.4.39(1) & (2)
10 March	Chief Executive Officer to advise Electoral Commissioner of the need to prepare a residents' roll.	s.4.40(1)
10 March to 21 March	Returning Officer to call for nominations between these dates.	s.4.47(1)
16 March	Close of enrolments 5.00pm for residents' and owners' and occupiers' rolls.	s.4.39(1)
22 March	Nominations opened	s.4.49(a)
30 March	Last day for preparation of owners' and occupiers' rolls and certification of these rolls by the Chief Executive Officer.	s.4.41(1) & (2)
30 March	Last day for residents' roll to be completed and certified by the Electoral Commissioner and forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer.	s.4.40(2)
5 April	Last day for withdrawal of nominations. Nominations closed at 4.00pm.	s.4.49(a), s.4.53(2a)
5 April	Returning Officer to announce names of candidates as soon as possible after 4.00pm.	s.4.54
6 April	Printing and compilation of voting packages commenced.	s.4.71(c), R.44
13 April	Last day for consolidation of rolls.	s.4.43(3)
16 April	Statewide public notice of election by Returning Officer.	s.4.64(1)
18-20 April	Voting packages despatched.	
23 April	Electors may apply for replacement postal voting package.	s.4.71(c), R.45
23 April	Electors may apply for provisional postal voting package.	s.4.71(c), R.46
5 May	Polling day. Counting commenced after 6.00pm at the nominated polling place. *	s.4.72
Finalisation of results	Election results and terms of office declared. Results published on 7 May 2001.	s.4.77, s.4.79, s.4.84

Table 2: Election Timetable

*Note: By arrangement with the respective local governments, the ballot papers were counted in Perth on Election night for the Shire of Ashburton, Shire of Carnarvon, Shire of East Pilbara, Shire of Exmouth, Shire of Gingin and Shire of Yilgarn.

5 RETURNING OFFICERS AND STAFF

5.1 Returning Officers

With a substantial rise in the number of postal elections, additional staff were recruited to act as Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers.

Some Commission staff were appointed together with people who had worked previously on state and non-parliamentary elections. A number of these staff had local government experience. All Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers were provided with specific training for Local Government elections.

Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers are listed at Appendix 11.

5.2 Administrative Staff

Conducting the 2001 elections was a major activity for the Western Australian Electoral Commission.

As the majority of local government election processes are labour-intensive there was a need to employ a large number of casual staff for checking and counting processes. Staff were drawn from a number of areas including local governments, the Western Australian Electoral Commission and the Commission’s pool of State General Election staff.

6 ADVERTISING

6.1 Statutory Advertising

The Act provides for the placement of three statutory advertisements in a newspaper circulating in the State. The advertisements and the dates on which they appeared in *The West Australian* newspaper are provided below:

- Notice of Close of Enrolments (s4.39 (2)) 28 February 2001
- Call for Nominations (s4.47 (1)) 14 March 2001
- Returning Officer’s Notice of Election (s4.64 (1)) 12 April 2001

The Notice of Results is not a statutory advertisement. This was placed in *The West Australian* newspaper on 7 May 2001.

In certain circumstances, such as where all positions are filled unopposed, results appeared with the third statutory advertisement.

6.2 Discretionary Advertising

Councils were offered the opportunity to place promotional advertisements in local papers.

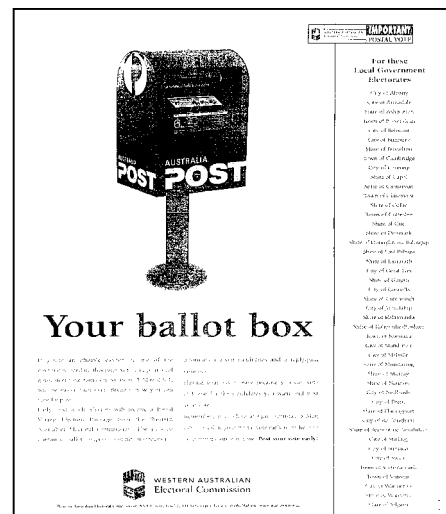


Figure 1: Local Government Election Advertisement

The Western Australian Electoral Commission contracted an advertising company to design the copy and place the advertisements.

Advertisements were placed in both *The West Australian* and community newspapers.

A company was engaged to provide media releases at strategic stages throughout the election campaign.

6.3 Website

The Electoral Commission's Internet pages were revised and substantially expanded prior to the opening of nominations for the elections. Each participating local government had a visual presence on the site in terms of logo, address and link to its home page.

People visiting the site could view a broad range of electoral information, including:

- key dates and deadlines for the election
- how-to-vote information
- previous postal voting election results
- lists of candidates (after close of nominations), Returning Officers and local government addresses

Importantly, for the first time, the majority of election results were available to the public on the Internet on election night. This provided information to many people who in the past would have only received these results in the following days through newspapers.

Positive feedback on the amount of detailed and up-to-date information and the user friendliness of the site was received throughout the election period from local governments, candidates and members of the general public.



Figure 2: Local Government Postal Election results on the Western Australian Electoral Commission Website.

7 PUBLICATIONS

7.1 Manuals and Forms

The rules, regulations and guidelines for Returning Officers, candidates and scrutineers were set out in manuals produced for the elections, along with a guide to the formality rules for marking ballot papers. These publications were provided to candidates and their scrutineers to assist them at the count.

The Department of Local Government supplied the Electoral Commission with copies of its own publication, *A Candidate's Guide to Standing for Council*, which was also available for candidates.

The *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997* provide 23 forms to be used for various electoral functions under the *Local Government Act 1995*. Additional forms were also developed by the Western Australian Electoral Commission to assist in the administration of the elections.

8 ELECTORAL ROLLS

In a postal election, it is essential to have electoral rolls with correct names and full postal addresses so that ballot papers can be mailed to electors. The rolls produced for the elections were:

- the residents' roll, extracted from the State Electoral Roll and certified by the Electoral Commissioner
- the owners' and occupiers' roll, produced by the local government and certified by the Chief Executive Officer

Enrolments closed at 5.00pm on Friday, 16 March 2001 for the 5 May 2001 local government elections. After enrolment claims received were processed, residents' rolls were produced from the State Electoral Roll with the names and postal addresses of eligible electors and certified by the Electoral Commissioner.

Owners' and occupiers' rolls also closed at 5.00pm on Friday, 16 March 2001. These rolls had to be checked and were then certified by the Chief Executive Officer of each local government by 30 March 2001.

Copies of the Commission's data exchange standards were sent to local governments to assist them to create their rolls in a format suitable for merging with the residents' roll. In some cases Commission staff assisted local governments in preparing their owners' and occupiers' rolls in the required format.

The correct date of birth of owners and occupiers is particularly important. It is used when comparing the owner/occupiers' roll with the residents' roll. If dates of birth are not the same, duplicates may remain undetected.

Under the *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997* candidates and councillors are entitled to receive one free copy of the electoral roll. The Commission provided residents' rolls in alphabetical or street order whilst the local government Chief Executive Officers arranged for copies of owners' and occupiers' roll to be made available. In some local governments the Chief Executive Officer made consolidated rolls available to members of council and candidates.

9 NOMINATIONS

Nominations were advertised in *The West Australian* newspaper on 14 March 2001. Nominations opened on 22 March 2001 and closed at 4.00pm on 5 April 2001.

9.1 Candidates

A total of 564 candidates nominated for 294 vacancies in 172 wards in 47 districts. At the close of nominations on 5 April 2001, there were 237 contested vacancies, 56 unopposed vacancies and 1 vacancy was unfilled.

508 candidates contested 237 vacancies in 45 districts that included 485 candidates for Councillor and 23 for Mayor. Of the 237 vacancies, 229 were for Councillor and 8 for Mayor.

9.2 Receipt of Nominations and Profiles

Candidate nominations and profiles were received throughout the nomination period. The profiles were checked by the Returning Officers. One copy was displayed on the Council noticeboard and the original forwarded to the Electoral Commission to be prepared for printing in a standardised format. Printing these profiles on one sheet (A3 and A4) reduced costs for printing and loading.

Returning Officers were present at the local government offices for two hours prior to the close of nominations at 4.00pm on Thursday, 5 April 2001, to accept final nominations from candidates. They announced the names of candidates and conducted the draws for ballot paper position as soon as possible after the close of nominations. This was followed by an information session, designed to explain the processes involved in a postal election.

The rules and regulations relating to candidates and scrutineers were discussed. Copies of manuals for candidates were available at this meeting. Candidates were also given information on the procedures for the postal vote checking centre and the counting locations.

9.3 Unopposed and Uncontested Wards

At the close of nominations on 5 April 2001, 43 of the 172 wards with vacancies received an equal number of candidates and these candidates were declared elected unopposed.

From a total of 294 vacancies, 56 candidates were elected unopposed and 1 vacancy (Shire of Lake Grace) was unfilled.

There were three vacancies in the Lake Grace ward of the Shire of Lake Grace for which two nominations were received. The remaining vacancy had to be filled at an extraordinary election.

9.4 Gender of Candidates

In 2001, 420 males and 144 females nominated for vacancies. Of that number, 204 males and 89 females were elected to vacancies.

A comparison with 1999 is shown below

	Contesting		Elected	
	2001	1999	2001	1999
Males	420	279	204	153
Females	144	95	89	63
TOTAL	564	374	293	216

The following shows the above information in tabular form.

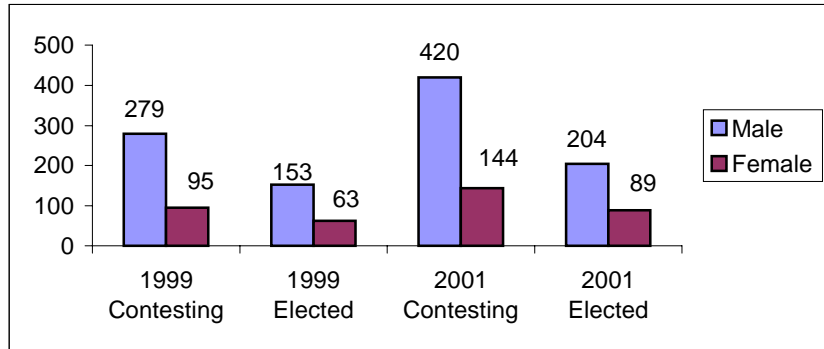


Chart 1: Candidates by Gender. Data Source: 66167.

26% of candidates who nominated for vacancies were female. This was a marginal increase on 25% in 1999. The proportion of women who succeeded in becoming elected remained at 4% higher than the proportion standing for election.

9.5 Age of Candidates

In 2001, the average age was 50 with an age range from 21 to 79. In 1999, the average age was 51 with an age range between 23 and 93.

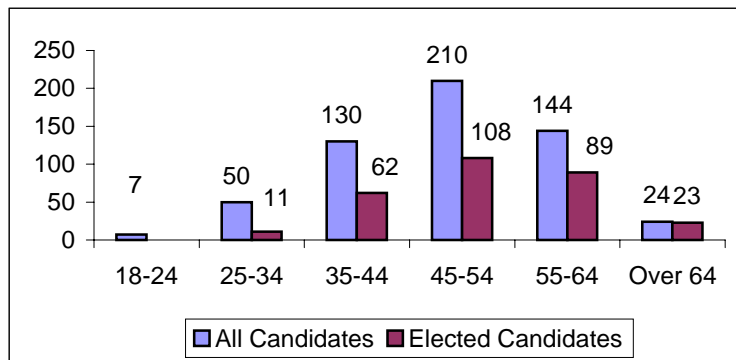


Chart 2: Candidates by Age Group. Data Source: 66176

10 ELECTION PACKAGES

10.1 Election Package Design

The design of the package used was revised with a view to making it more evident to electors that the information referred to postal elections.

The package comprised six separate parts:

1. Information brochure
2. Profile of up to 150 words about each candidate with an optional photograph
3. Ballot paper
4. Ballot paper envelope with an elector's certificate, containing a declaration to be signed by that elector, as a removable flap
5. Despatch envelope
6. Reply paid return envelope

10.1.1 Information Brochures

The information brochure was designed with a customer focus and written in plain English. It contained information about the election, instructions and contact names and addresses for each district. Each local government also had its crest printed on the brochures sent to its electors. Brief instructions in a range of community languages common to the district were also included.

10.1.2 Candidate Profiles

A standard template was designed to ensure that candidate profiles could fit onto a single page. The content was checked to ensure that candidates complied with the spirit of regulation 24(b) which provides for profiles to include biographical information about the proposed candidate and statements of the candidate's policies or beliefs. A team of staff from the Commission proofed the profiles for each district, ward and mayoral election.

10.1.3 Ballot Paper

Regulation 45(5) of the *Local Government Elections (Regulations) 1997* provide that before giving a ballot paper to an elector, it must be authenticated in a way approved by the Returning Officer.

The Commission uses a process for printing ballot papers that involves a combination of screens and ink colours. If photocopied, the words "Illegal copy" appear on the paper. This ensures that ballot papers cannot be reproduced by unauthorised persons.

10.1.4 Ballot Paper Envelopes

A standard envelope was used for all districts. The elector's certificate was printed as a flap, which could be sliced off using an automatic letter opener. The design of this flap enabled the elector's address to be visible in the window of the despatch envelope.

The ballot paper envelope incorporated a form on the reverse which electors could complete to notify a change of address.

The front of Elector's Certificate

You MUST sign this declaration

Elector's Certificate Form 14	
<small>Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997, reg. 43(1)(e)</small>	
Declaration <small>(Making a false declaration is an offence)</small>	I am the elector to whom a package containing the attached ballot paper envelope was addressed. I declare that the attached ballot paper envelope contains my ballot paper(s)
Date: <i>26/04/01</i>	Signature:

CHANGED YOUR ADDRESS ?
(COMPLETE ON REVERSE OF THIS CERTIFICATE)

Elector's Certificate

Has your name or address changed?

New name	
New residential address	
New postal address	

Back of the Ballot Paper Envelope

1. Make sure you tick ✓ your ballot paper(s) following the instructions on the ballot paper(s).
2. Only put your completed ballot paper(s) in this envelope and seal it (at right).
Do not put any other person's ballot paper(s) in this envelope.
3. Make sure you sign the elector's certificate. Do not detach it from this envelope.
4. Put this envelope into the reply paid envelope provided with this package.
5. Post it straight away.

SEAL HERE

PUT YOUR OWN COMPLETED BALLOT PAPER(S) IN THIS ENVELOPE

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN Electoral Commission

Figure 3: Ballot Paper Envelope

10.1.5 Despatch Envelopes

The envelopes had a large window to allow the Australia Post barcode as well as the elector's information to be viewed. The address of the Commission was provided for the return of unclaimed mail.

10.2 Election Package Despatch

As packages were produced for each ward, a high level of quality control was necessary to ensure that each elector received the correct package. With around 800,000 packages going out to 131 wards, this was a major undertaking.

The two weeks available under the current provision is not considered sufficient for this process. An approach will be made to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development to extend this period. This will have the effect of lengthening the election campaign for candidates. At present, with the mailout occurring two weeks after the close of nominations, candidates effectively have a 2 – 3 week campaign period because the majority of electors vote soon after receiving their papers.

10.2.1 Despatch and Return Period

A two-week period is allowed for the return of ballot papers to allow for any delays in despatch or return and giving consideration to those electors living in remote locations. Most electors receive their packages a day after posting and approximately half of all electors return their packages within the first 3-4 days.

The four weeks currently provided between close of nominations and Election Day means packages are despatched about 2 weeks before the event. This is a tight time frame for country local governments where mail service is not a daily occurrence.

11 REPLACEMENT AND PROVISIONAL PACKAGES

Electors who had lost, spoilt, misplaced or claimed not to have received their election package, or part of it, could claim a replacement. If an elector had been omitted from the roll in error he or she could claim a provisional vote. Statistics on the number of replacement and provisional votes issued in each district are provided at Appendix 4.

11.1 Replacement Packages

Replacement packages could be claimed either by visiting the local government offices or the Electoral Commission, or by making a request for an application form over the telephone. Replacement ballot papers were also issued to those electors making the appropriate declaration. The number of replacement elector profiles, brochures or return envelopes issued were not recorded as they did not affect the secrecy or security of the ballot. These materials were simply handed out to electors on request.

While this represented an additional workload for local government staff, who had to be trained to issue the appropriate forms and complete the paper work, the numbers were low in comparison with the number of electors. A total of 1841 replacement packages or ballot papers were issued for the 45 local governments conducting elections, an average of 41. This was identical to the 1999 average.

11.2 Provisional Packages

Provisional packages were only issued if electors were omitted inadvertently from the residents' or owners' and occupiers' rolls.

Because the *Local Government Act 1995* requires electors to have enrolled, not simply to have been eligible to enrol before the close of the roll, only 206 provisional votes were issued. See Appendix 5. This compares with 156 in 1999.

12 RETURN OF PACKAGES

12.1 Postal Vote Checking Centre

A warehouse at Welshpool was used as a centralised postal vote checking centre with security and accessibility for visitors and mail delivery.

Four teams of staff were used to manage the election process.

The large number of packages sent to electors (831,605) required a considerable number of staff to ensure that checking and roll mark-off procedures were completed within the 2-week period prior to Election Day.

12.2 Attendance of Candidates and Scrutineers

In accordance with the *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997* candidates and authorised scrutineers were admitted to observe the processes used in checking and admitting packages and the counting of votes.

12.3 Receipt of Mail

Mail was delivered at approximately 11.30am each day through to Saturday, 5 May 2001 (Election Day) except Wednesday 25 April (Anzac Day). The number of postal votes received each day was recorded by Australia Post and is shown in the following graph with a district summary at Appendix 2.

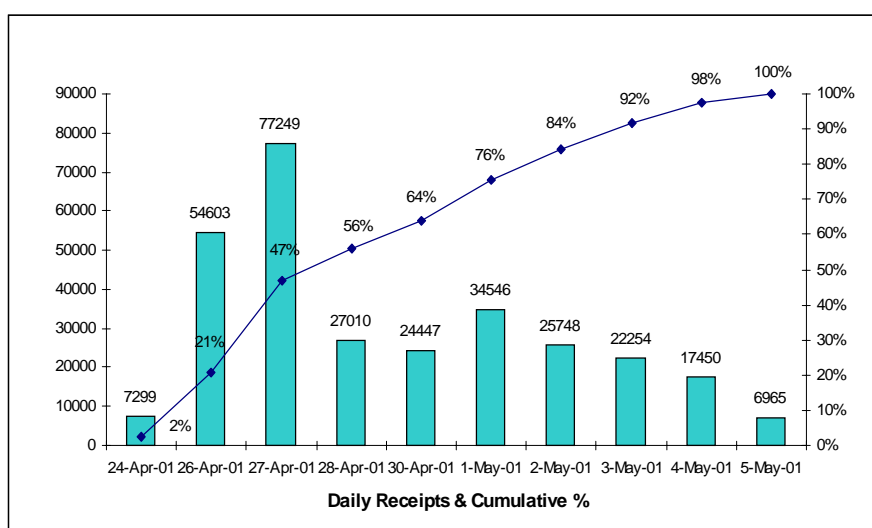


Chart 3: Postal Vote Package Receipts from Australia Post. Data Source: 66185.

The above figures from Australia Post are only indicative of the number of packages received on a daily basis. The figures do not include packages that were hand delivered.

In 2001, 64% of the total packages returned were received by the end of the first week. In 1999, this was 68%.

This information is useful for candidates and councils, as strategies can be put in place after the first week to further advertise their election if it appears that there will be a low participation.

13 CHECKING OF POSTAL VOTES

13.1 The Postal Voting Checking Process

Unlike an in-person election, where the elector has his or her name marked off the roll then marks the ballot paper and places it in a ballot box, a considerable amount of pre-processing is required to admit a postal vote to the count.

The checking processes included:

- receipt of voting packages from Australia Post on a daily basis
- opening the outer envelopes and checking the elector's certificate
- scanning the barcodes to mark each elector off the roll
- compiling records and statistics of returned packages and rejected packages
- controlling and issuing information to, and on behalf of, candidates and scrutineers
- removing the electors' certificates from the ballot paper envelopes
- retaining any electors' certificates with change of name and address details
- removing the ballot paper from the ballot paper envelope without examination and placing it in a ballot box.

Each barcode was scanned to mark the elector's name off the roll. Batch totals were kept by the system and checked to ensure all barcodes were scanned. The system would not allow a barcode to be scanned more than once.

13.2 Signature Audits

Each returned package was checked to ensure that the signature corresponded with the name that was printed on the certificate. At the request of the City of Perth, signatures of owners and occupiers were compared with original enrolment forms.

This confirmed the outcome of previous signature audits conducted at the last three local government elections for the City of Perth, that electors are voting honestly and there is no evidence of deliberate fraud.

13.3 Change of Address Notification

An area was provided on the elector's certificate for electors to complete if they had changed their name and/or address. Residents' certificates with changes were forwarded to the Australian Electoral Commission to allow action to be taken to update the residents' roll. Owners' and occupiers' certificates containing change of address information were returned to each Chief Executive Officer after the election for follow up. These procedures assist in maintaining accuracy of the rolls.

13.4 Recording of Replacement and Provisional Packages

At the end of each day, each local government's electronic roll was updated with information provided by local government staff regarding replacement and provisional packages issued.

Occasionally an elector was issued with a replacement package but later received and returned the original package. This was detected by the barcode scanning system, which ensured only one package was admitted. This process ensured that no duplicate votes were accepted.

13.5 Rejected Packages

Some returned packages could not be accepted. The three main reasons were:

- the elector certificate was not returned with the voting package
- the elector certificate was not signed
- the signature did not appear to comply with regulations

The reason for rejecting an election package was recorded. Appendix 2 shows the number of rejected packages by local government district and the reason for their rejection.

The following chart compares rejected packages in 2001 with 1999.

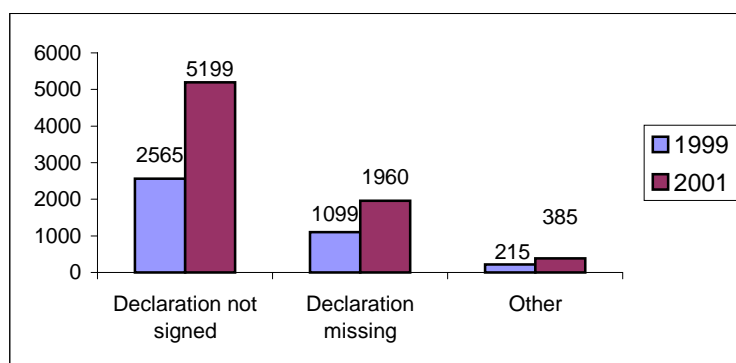


Chart 4: Rejected Packages in 1999 and 2001. Data Source: 66356

In 2001, 7544 or 2.38% of packages were rejected from the total of 315,821 packages returned. In 1999, 1.9% of packages were rejected.

The largest number of rejections was due to the elector not signing the certificate. In 2001, an amendment to the legislation prior to the ordinary elections has removed the need for the elector to write his or her name and address. This, however, appears to have had little impact on voters not signing the declaration.

14 ELECTION DAY

14.1 Polling Places

The Act requires a polling place to be open on polling day in each local government district. In the majority of cases these were at the offices of the local governments, however some councils selected other convenient venues. The

City of Melville was the only council to have more than one polling place set up on Election Day.

On the Saturday of the election, staff at polling places issued replacement and provisional voting packages and electors who had not posted their ballot paper packages could hand them in to the Returning Officer or appointed electoral officers.

14.2 Packages Received on Election Day

A small number of voting packages were hand-delivered or requested as replacement or provisional votes on Election Day. A few electors came in to vote on Election Day, believing they could cast an in-person vote. This occurred mostly in local governments that had not previously conducted their elections by post.

14.3 Transfer of Ballot Boxes from Checking Centre to Polling Places

Sealed ballot boxes containing ballot papers removed during the checking process were despatched under secure conditions to the local government polling places prior to the close of poll. The Returning Officer added ballot papers hand-delivered during Election Day.

14.4 Counting Locations

In general the count was conducted at the local government headquarters after the close of the poll.

As previously mentioned, six country local governments, opted to have their count conducted at the Western Australian Electoral Commission.

15 COUNTING

The first-past-the-post count method is used in Local Government elections. Candidates receiving the most votes are elected, regardless of their percentage of the vote. Voters have the option of marking choices up to the number of candidates to be elected. For example, if there are four candidates to be elected an elector can vote for one, two, three or four candidates.

In most elections the count was conducted manually.

For an election such as in the Shire of Capel, where 17 candidates were competing for 11 vacancies, the number of possible combinations meant that a computer based count was quicker than a manual count. A number of data-entry staff key in the votes for each candidate into a computer system, which then tallies these votes to arrive at a result.

Counts conducted using the computer system were at:

- Shire of Capel
- Shire of Collie
- City of Geraldton
- City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder
- City of Perth

16 RESULTS

All results were telephoned or faxed to the results centre on election night.

A centralised Local Government Elections System recorded data from each polling place at the Commission. This information was sent to the Western Australian Municipal Association (WAMA) and the media via e-mail and published on the Internet on the night. The results may still be viewed on the Internet at the Western Australian Electoral Commission site – www.waec.wa.gov.au. These results were updated on the Sunday for official publication in *The West Australian* newspaper on Monday, 7 May 2001.

The *Reports to Minister* (Form 20) and statistics on the candidates and participation rates were produced from the Commission's Local Government Election system.

Copies of results for all mayoral and council elections are at Appendix 10.

16.1 Sitting Members

Of the 564 candidates who nominated for elections, 195 were sitting councillors (33.68%).

Of the 293 vacancies filled, sitting councillors were elected to 152 positions (51.9%) while other candidates were elected to 141 vacancies (48.1%).

77.9% of the sitting candidates were re-elected.

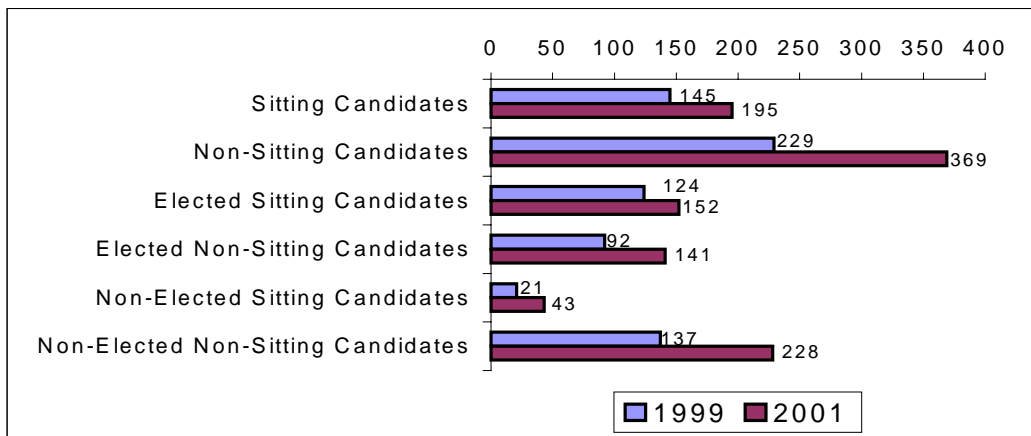


Chart 5: A Comparison of the Electoral Success of Sitting and Non-sitting Members in 1999 and 2001.

Data Source: 66179

The recognition obtained from holding office appears to have served sitting councillors well, with the majority that were seeking re-election being successful.

16.2 Candidate Statistics

The table below provides summary candidate statistics.

	Councillor	Mayor	Total
Vacancies	286	8	294
Vacancies Filled Unopposed	56	0	56
Vacancies Uncontested	1	0	1
Vacancies Contested	229	8	237
Total Candidates at Close of Nominations	541	23	564
Male Candidates	400	20	420
Female Candidates	141	3	144
Vacancies Elected Unopposed	56	0	56
Male Candidates Elected Unopposed	37	0	37
Female Candidates Elected Unopposed	19	0	19
Total Candidates in Contested Elections	485	23	508
Male Candidates in Contested Elections	363	20	383
Female Candidates in Contested Elections	122	3	125
Total Candidates Elected	285	8	293
Males Elected	197	7	204
Females Elected	88	1	59
Male Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	160	7	167
Female Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	69	1	70
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-Nominating	184	6	190
Sitting Councillors/Mayors not Re-Nominating	45	2	47
Total Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-Elected	146	6	152
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-elected in Contested Elections	107	6	113
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-elected Unopposed	39	0	39
Sitting Councillors/Mayors not Re-elected	38	0	38

Table 3: Summary Candidate Statistics

17 PARTICIPATION

The participation rate between 2001 and 1999 appears to be stable with 12 local governments showing a slight increase and the same number showing a slight decrease (see Appendix 14). Where figures differ by more than 3% it is usually attributable to either a mayoral election or a different number of wards involved.

Large metropolitan local governments, which under the in-person system often recorded turnouts of under 10%, all had improved turnouts.

The City of Canning and the City of Gosnells, both new to the postal voting method, recorded greatly increased participation rates in 2001 as compared to 1999. This is illustrated below.

Local Government	1999 In-Person Election	2001 Postal Election
City of Canning	5.1%	35.6%
City of Gosnells	9.6%	32.2%

Table 4: Comparative Statistics – Participation Rate for Local Governments. Data Source: 55185

In comparison to in-person elections, postal elections continue to show much better participation in all but very small shires with a high level of community interest.

In 2001, a total of 315,821 packages were returned. 81% of eligible local government electors used the postal method of voting with an average participation rate of 38%. The 19% of local government electors using the in-person method of voting produced an average participation rate of 25.9%. An average figure is not strictly comparable as different districts, wards and elector numbers were involved.

Average in-person participation rates rose from 19.3% in 1999 to 25.9% in 2001 and the postal vote decreased from 42% to 38%. This can be attributed to a number of the larger local governments changing to the postal method this year, leaving two large metropolitan districts, three small metropolitan districts, and many small country shires comprising the 19% of the local government electors voting. These are generally small electorates with a high level of community interest.

A full comparison between local governments who used the postal election process in 2001 and 1999 is at Appendix 14.

17.1 Participation Ratio for Metropolitan and Country Districts

The Town of Cottesloe recorded the highest participation rate in the metropolitan area with a rate of 51.1%. The lowest rate recorded was the City of Joondalup, at 29.7%. Comparisons across districts are not useful, however, because of the variation in size and wards contested. The only valid comparison is between similar districts or a district's own past history.

Participation Rates for Metropolitan Local Governments

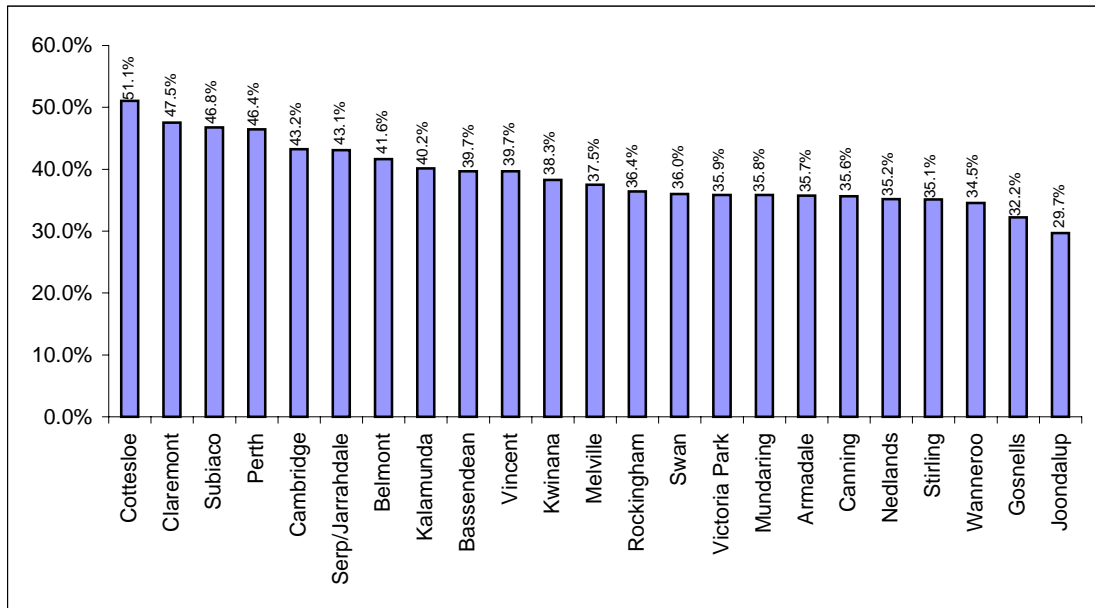


Chart 6: Participation Rate – Metropolitan Local Governments. Source: 66361

Participation Rates for Country Local Governments

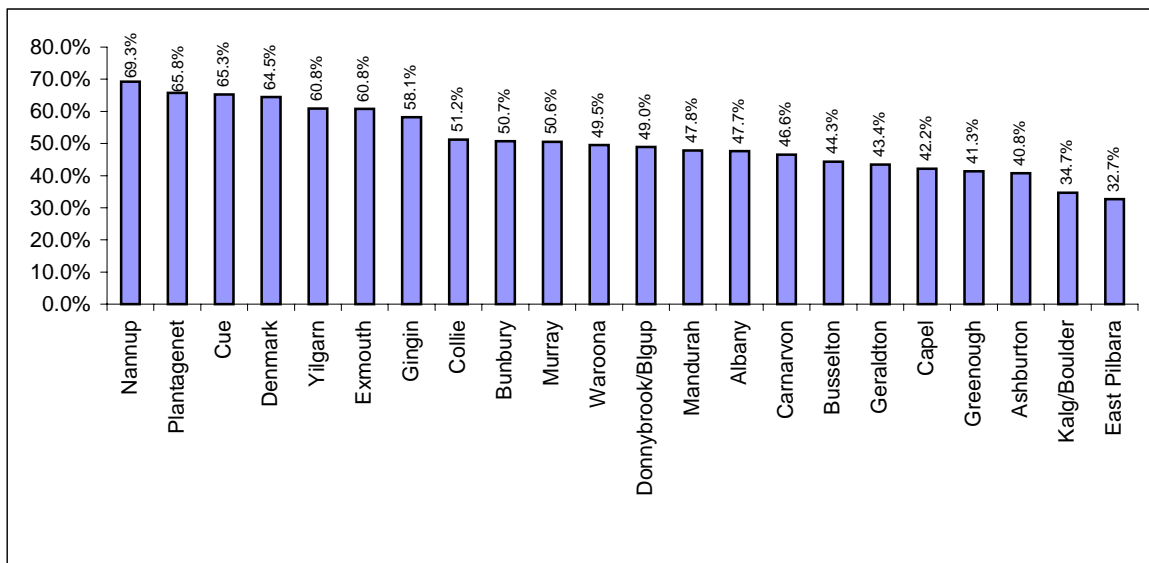


Chart 7: Participation Rate – Country Local Governments. Source: 66361

The Shire of Nannup recorded the highest participation rate in the country with a rate of 69.3% and the Shire of East Pilbara recorded the lowest rate at 32.7%.

17.2 Age of Electors and Voters

The Commission has used twelve age groups for comparison purposes.

While the introduction of postal voting has increased the participation, there continues to be a lower participation rate than enrolment in the following age groups: 18-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39 and 40-49.

In the 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69 and 70+ age groups, the participation percentage rate is greater than the enrolment percentage.

In the 45-49 age group, the participation percentage is the same as enrolment percentage (10.2%).

In 1999, the Commission observed that that younger electors appeared to be less interested in voting in local government elections than those aged 45 and over. The 2001 results support this observation and is a matter that local governments may wish to address with a view to seeking greater involvement of the whole community in elections.

A summary of the data in Appendix 6 shows the actual number of electors and voters by age group.

17.3 Age and Gender of Electors and Voters

Men and women were represented almost equally on the electoral roll.

Women account for 51.2% of the enrolment. A summary of the data in Appendix 7 shows the actual number of electors and voters by age group and gender.

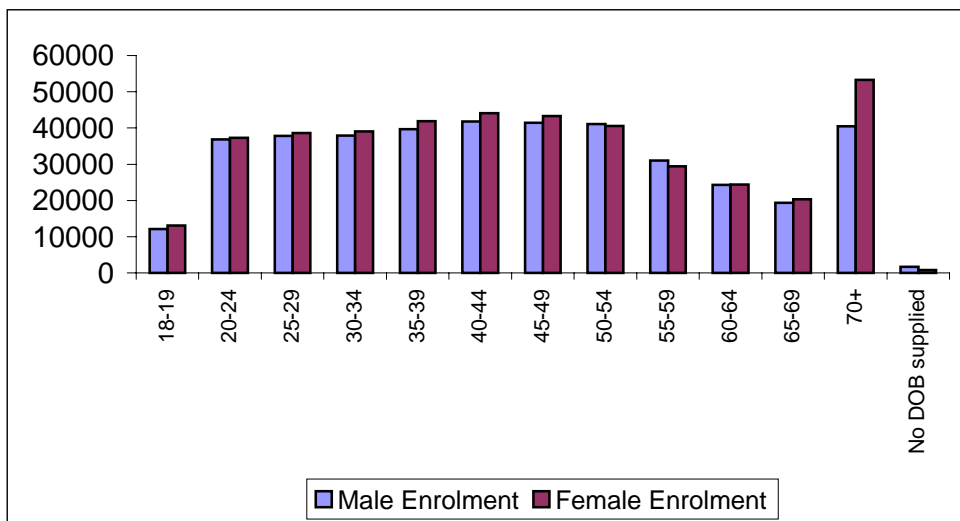


Chart 8: Enrolment by Age Group and Gender. Source: 66374
 (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth or gender was not supplied.)

As for enrolment, the same pattern is evident in voting. Females account for 19.8% of voters as a percentage of enrolment or 52.4% of the total number of voters who participated in 2001.

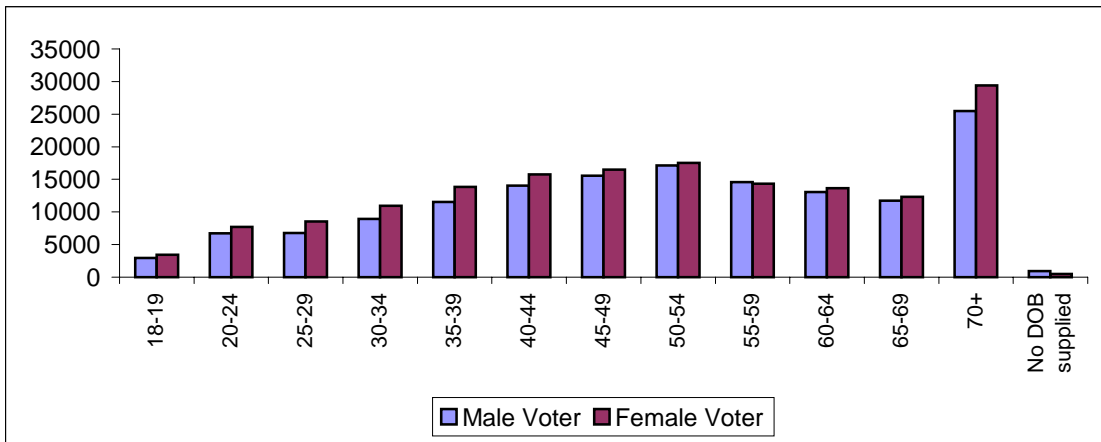


Chart 9: Voters by Age Group and Gender. Source: 66374
(Note: Includes electors whose date of birth or gender was not supplied.)

17.4 Age and Location of Electors and Voters

Of the 47 districts involved in postal elections, 22 were from the metropolitan area and the balance from the country and outer-metropolitan areas.

Some country districts have metropolitan residents on their owners' and occupiers' rolls and their participation has been analysed in the individual reports sent to each local government.

Appendix 9 shows the actual number of electors and voters by age group and location.

Enrolment in the metropolitan area accounted for 82.3% of postal electors with the majority in age groups 20-54 and 70+. Voters accounted for 78.3% with the majority in age groups 40-64 and 70+. This is illustrated in the chart below.

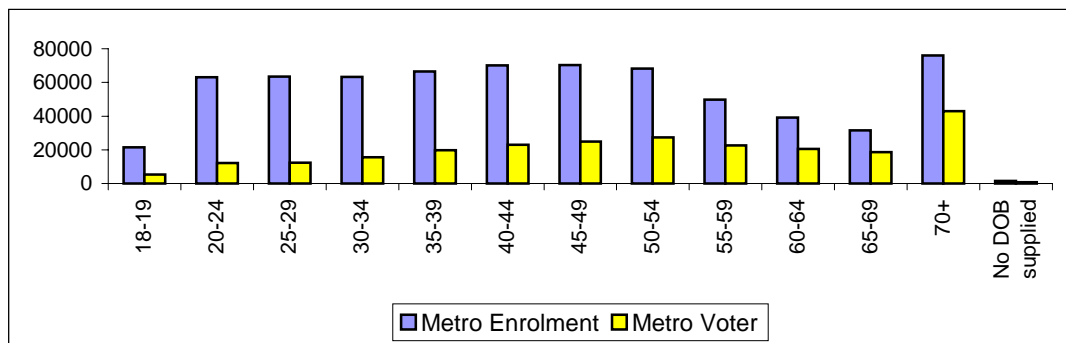


Chart 10: Enrolment and Voting in the Metropolitan Area. Source: 66374
(Note: Includes voters whose date of birth was not supplied.)

Enrolment in the country area accounted for 17.7% of postal electors with the majority in age groups 20-54 and 70+. Voters accounted for 21.7% with the majority in age groups 40-64 and 70+. This is illustrated in the chart below.

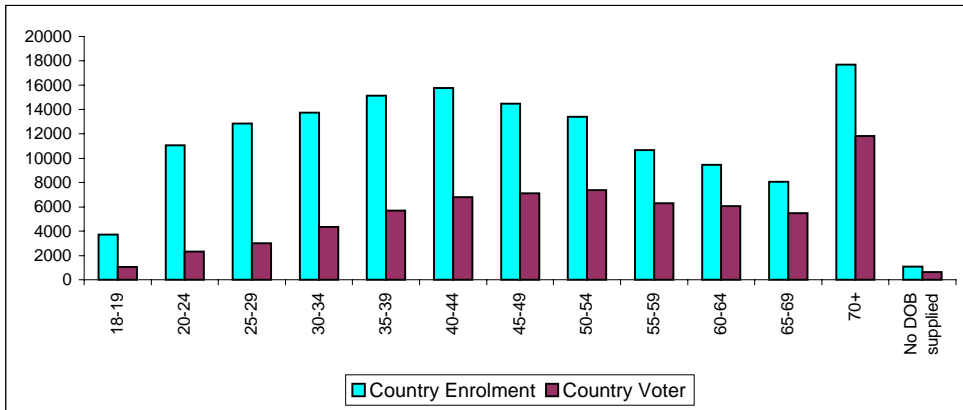


Chart 11: Enrolment and Voting in the Country. Source: 66374
(Note: Includes voters whose date of birth was not supplied.)

It is evident that country electors vote in greater proportion to their enrolment than metropolitan electors as illustrated in the following chart.

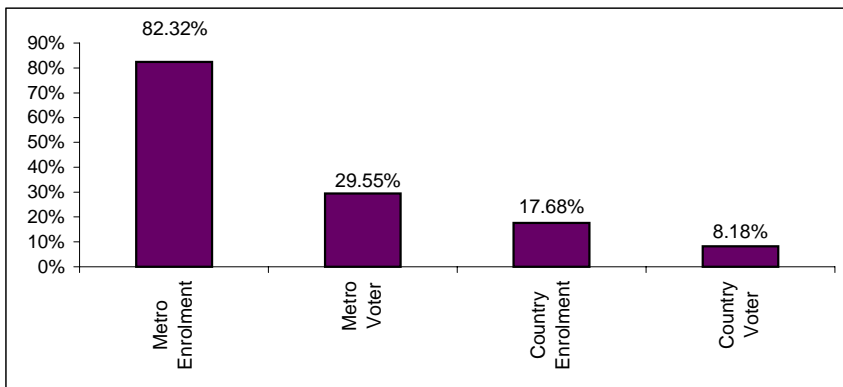


Chart 12: Metropolitan Enrolment and Voting Compared with Country Enrolment and Voting. Source: 66374.

17.5 Electors and Voters by Enrolment Type

Residents comprised 97.8% of enrolment and 96.7% of electors who voted in this election.

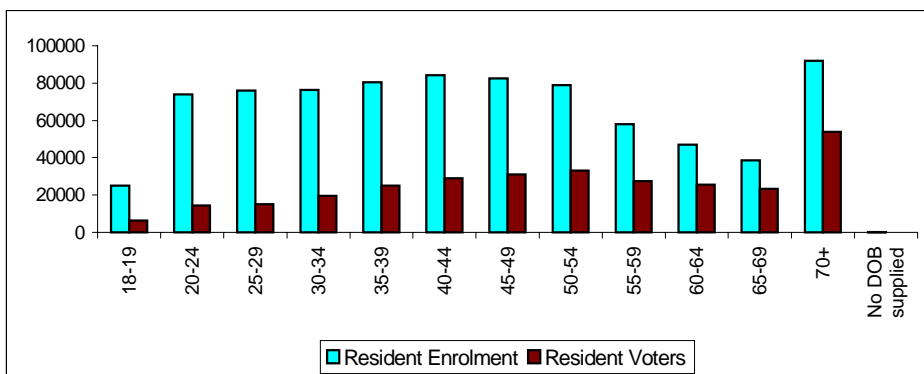


Chart 13: Residents' Enrolment and Voter Participation. Source: 66374
(Note: Includes electors whose date of birth was not supplied.)

Owners and occupiers comprised 2.23% of enrolment and 3.26% of electors who voted in this election.

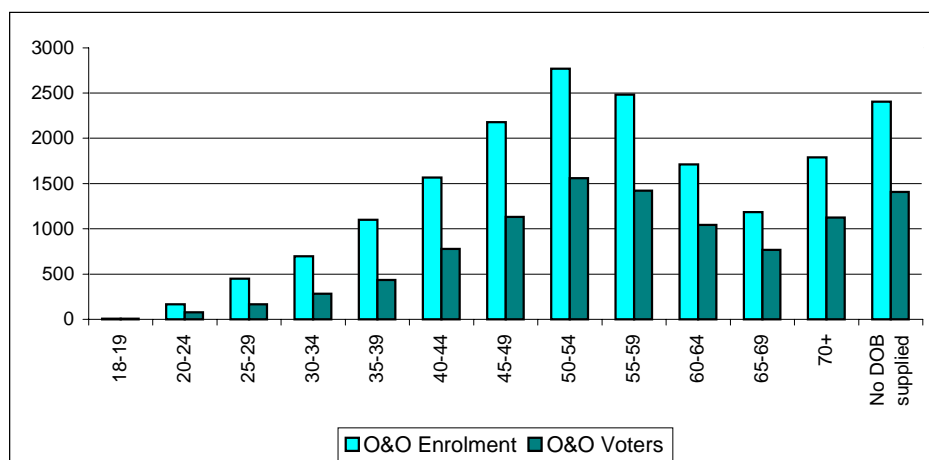


Chart 14: Owner and Occupier Enrolment and Voter Participation. Source: 66374
(Note: Includes electors whose date of birth was not supplied.)

A summary of the data in Appendix 9 shows the actual number of electors and voters by age group and enrolment type.

17.6 Comparison of Participation in Postal and In-Person Elections

While only 47 of the 139 local governments participating in local government elections in 2001, adopted postal voting, postal elections served approximately 81% of the state's eligible electors. Of the total number of electors who voted in the ordinary elections, postal voters accounted for 89.4%.

Participation in postal and in-person local government elections is difficult to compare across the State, due to the large number of electorates with small populations and the large number of wards that do not go to election because they are uncontested or unopposed. However, the following table shows a comparison of major statistics relating to postal and in-person elections in 2001.

	Postal	% of Total	In-person	% of Total
Districts participating	47	33.1%	62	66.9%
Total no. of wards with vacancies	172	36.0%	306	64.0%
No. of wards uncontested (no candidates)	1	0.6%	5	1.6%
No. of wards with candidates elected unopposed	42	24.4%	195	63.8%
Total no. of wards contested	129	75.0%	106	34.6%
Number of electors in contested elections	831,605	85.2%	144,682	14.8%
Number of voters	315,821	89.4%	37,405	10.6%

Table 5: Summary of Participation in 2001 Local Government Elections. Total does not include Referendum or Mayoral figures, except in wards where there was a Mayoral election only (ie no contest for council vacancies) to avoid double counting of electors or voters. Figures for in-person elections do not include owners and occupiers if the vacancy was not contested. Data Source for In-Person Elections: Department of Local Government and Regional Development.

17.7 Postal Election Participation

Postal elections increase participation. Voting is optional and participation is generally higher than in-person elections. Voter participation needs to be understood in the context of small versus large local governments. In 1997, the average participation rate was 47%. In 1999, the rate was 42%. In 2001, the rate was 38%. The reduction can be attributed to an increase in the number of larger local governments in the metropolitan area using the postal option. Large electorates generally have lower voter participation. This has the effect of lowering the average rate. The participation rates in these larger local governments is, however, much higher than was achieved under the in-person method.

Since 1997, postal voting has become the dominant mode of voting in Western Australia. This has implications for the legislation which, until now, has been directed principally at the in-person method with provision for the postal voting alternative.

17.8 In-Person Election Participation

It is evident that electors participate readily in in-person elections in districts with a small population. In 2001, 62 local governments, comprising 141,587 electors and 36,233 voters, used the in-person method and achieved an average participation of 26%. The turnout varies considerably, however, according to the elector base.

For example, 19 local governments had an elector base of less than 300 in 2001. These local governments comprised 3,149 electors and 1,867 voters with an average participation of 59%.

23 local governments had an elector base of between 301 and 999 electors in 2001. These local governments comprised 13,190 electors and 5,900 voters with an average participation of 45%

7 local governments had an elector base of between 1000 to 2499 electors in 2001. These local governments comprised 14,383 electors and 5,808 voters with an average participation of 40%.

5 local governments had an elector base of between 2500 to 4999 electors in 2001. These local governments comprised 19,411 electors and 5,162 voters with an average participation of 27%.

Finally, 8 local governments had an elector base of 5000 plus electors in 2001. These local governments comprised 94,549 electors and 18,668 voters with an average participation of 20%.

The following table provides a comparison between postal and in-person elections in neighbouring districts in 2001.

Postal	%	In-person	%
Bassendean	39.7		
Belmont	41.6	Bayswater	11.9
Stirling	35.1		
Vincent	39.7		
<hr/>			
Waroona	49.4		
Collie	51.2	Harvey	19.8
Bunbury	50.7	Dardanup	8.8

Table 6: A comparison of Participation between Postal and In-Person Elections in Neighbouring Districts.

In certain country areas where the population is small and there is a strong sense of community the participation for in-person elections can be as high as 80%.

Large Metropolitan electorates generally obtain relatively low participation rates. If there are controversial issues or there is a keenly contested mayoral election, the rate will be higher.

The data indicates generally that the larger the elector base, the lower the participation rate, which is consistent with the result for postal elections. It is evident that postal voting generally leads to better participation levels but that in small populations where there is a high level of community interest, in-person voting achieves a reasonable turnout.

18 LATE MAIL

Some electors did not return their mail in time for the count, despite a special delivery being arranged on Election Day.

In 2001, 7353 packages (an average of 0.88%) were received late for the 45 local governments that went to an election. (Records kept to 18 May)

In comparison, in 1999, 3439 packages (an average of 0.72%) were received late for the 30 local governments that went to an election.

Details of the number of packages received late by each Local Government are at Appendix 12.

Whilst the percentage of late mail is not significant, it does indicate that some electors are not aware of the time it can take to return postal voting packages. Rather than bring in the package to a polling place on Election Day, some voters are returning these packages by post even though they may not be received in time for admittance to the count. Some voters are under the impression that postal voting is compulsory and send in packages weeks and months after Election Day.

A postal election closing on a non-business day may account for the high number of packages received on the Monday. Some States in Australia use a day mid-week as the closing day.

19 UNCLAIMED MAIL

Election packages were returned by Australia Post if the elector was no longer at the address shown on the roll. An attempt was made to direct the election package to another address if the electoral roll or the local government had a different residential address to the postal address supplied.

A total of 16,804 were returned unclaimed, representing 2.02% of the total despatched. After the election, the unclaimed election packages were collated by district. Mail not claimed by owners and occupiers was forwarded to each local government so that it could take steps to update its owners' and occupiers' roll. The movement of residents who were on the State roll has been used to update the Commonwealth and State electoral rolls.

Statistics on the return of unclaimed election packages are shown at Appendix 13.

20 COSTS

Costs that could be directly attributed to individual local governments were allocated accordingly. Costs associated with the scanning centre were allocated pro-rata on the basis of the numbers of packages scanned for each local government.

All other costs that could not be attributed directly to individual local governments were allocated pro-rata according to the number of electors involved.

Larger local governments tend to benefit from economies of scale while smaller local governments are more affected by fixed costs, such as Returning Officer fees, when apportioned over a smaller number of electors. For this reason the Western Australian Electoral Commission arranged centralised processing so that cost savings could be realised by all local governments.

The Commission is entitled to cost recovery under the *Local Government Act 1995* and therefore is unable to give a firm quotation to a local government prior to the election. However, the Commission made every effort to provide estimates to local governments, which proved to be accurate.

The average cost per elector for the forty-seven local governments in 2001 was \$2.64 including GST. These costs were allocated in two instalments, the first invoice was sent prior to the end of the 2000/2001 financial year with the balance payable when full costs were known.

The pre-GST average cost is \$2.40 or 4% higher than the average cost of \$2.31 in 1999.

21 RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the ordinary elections, the Commission reviewed a number of procedural difficulties in the administration of postal elections. There is less commonality in the procedures for in-person elections and postal elections than the original legislation contemplated and it is timely to consider whether the Act should separate the two processes, rather than attempting to weld the postal and in-person timetable together.

The following matters were considered and the recommendations have been made to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development.

1. Method of Voting

When a Council chooses the postal method, it is usually an enduring decision. Many local governments have expressed surprise that they are required to meet and make a formal decision again at the next by-election or ordinary election.

Additionally small numbers of local governments decide to hold in-person elections for extraordinary elections and postal elections for their ordinary elections, purely on the basis of cost. To revert to the in-person system during the period of tenure of a Council elected by a postal electorate is an unsound electoral practice, as all sitting Councillors are then effectively not representative of the same group of people.

Recommendation

That once a Council has made a decision to use postal voting it should remain in force until a formal decision is made by Council to revert to the in-person method.

2. Boundary Changes

Prior to both the May 99 and 2001 ordinary elections, many district and ward boundary changes were made at the last moment. The Commission then had to change electors' details to reflect these changes. Because the changes were done early in 2001, there was insufficient time for local governments to confirm the accuracy of enrolment changes to ward rolls, which caused a number of errors to occur on electoral rolls, which were produced in April.

Recommendation

That all boundary changes for local governments be finalised 60 days before the close of rolls for an election.

3. Eligibility of Candidates

There have been two instances of candidates nominating in the belief that they were eligible, but later found to be ineligible. Confusion had arisen over their status as owner/occupier or nominee.

If a candidate is qualified to be an elector of the requisite category, he or she is then able to stand. There is currently no requirement to be on the roll for that election. The Returning Officer, however, needs an authoritative roll at the time of nominations, which will clearly show which electors are eligible to stand for Council. If this is not available there is the potential for an ineligible elector to nominate and for the election later to be declared invalid.

Recommendation

That all candidates be on the roll as either owners, occupiers, or residents at the close of rolls. If a candidate is only on the roll as a nominee, he or she would continue to be ineligible to stand.

4. Early Voting

The Commission received several complaints from voters who knew they would not be at their home address when the packages were despatched but were not able to

apply for an early vote, as there is currently no provision for an early vote in a postal election.

Recommendation

That the same provisions for an early vote apply to postal elections, up until the packages are despatched, as to in-person elections.

5. Election Package Production and Despatch

Postal voting is now the dominant mode of voting comprising around 80% of electors and consideration must be given to ensuring that sufficient time is available for this process. The printing of packages, which are customised for wards within local government districts, is a process that takes time and needs full quality control checks. The present schedule allows barely a week for this process, and it often occurs over Easter, when printers charge overtime, thereby increasing the cost to local governments.

Under the present schedule electors in country areas are disadvantaged as the mail service take several days each way and as a consequence they have only a very short time in which to be able to complete and return their election packages.

The provision of an extra week in the schedule would enable country packages to be despatched earlier, which would provide a longer turnaround time. An extension of time will also have the effect of providing candidates with a longer election campaign. At present the campaign effectively ends within a few days of the despatch of packages.

Recommendation

That the period between the close of nominations and the election be extended by one week

6. Elector Certificate

There are two problems with the current Elector Certificate:

- (1) In 1999 the rejection rate of postal votes was quite high. A number were rejected because electors did not complete the Certificate with their full name and address. This was already printed on the Commission's Certificates because the Commission uses it as an address label when posting packages out to electors.

An amendment was sought by the Commission for electors to simply sign and date their Certificates and this was made. Local governments conducting in-person elections, however, did not use the Certificate as a mailing label, so elector details were not on the certificate and certificates were returned with only a signature, which was frequently indecipherable and had no other evidence of the elector's name.

Recommendation

That the name and address of the elector should either be printed on the Elector Certificate or the elector must complete his or her name and address in writing as well as providing a signature.

- (2) Many electors do not sign the Certificate at all, yet still return their vote. There seems to be a lack of understanding that an unsigned Certificate will lead to a rejection of the ballot paper. (In 2001, 5199 postal packages were rejected from the total returned because the declaration was not signed.)

Recommendation

That the wording on the elector's declaration on the Elector's Certificate be amended to include a clear statement that the vote will be rejected if the Certificate is not signed.

7. Elector Assistance

There is no provision for an elector who is unable to sign to be given assistance to sign an elector certificate. This has the potential to disenfranchise such electors.

Recommendation

That provision is made for an elector to be given assistance in completing the Elector Certificate if he or she is unable to sign because of disability.

8. Close of Voting

A postal election should not be a defacto in-person election. By permitting electors to come to a polling place on election day, electors are led to believe that they can still vote in-person. They discover that they must, instead, apply for a replacement postal vote. There is also a significant cost attached to staffing a polling place for a day, which is high in proportion to the number of electors who attend, particularly in small local governments.

If the election were to be a true postal election and the instruction sheet clearly stated that there was no provision to come to a polling place on election day the Commission believes that voters would not delay voting until the last day.

Recommendation

That the hand delivery of postal packages closes on the last day for mail delivery before the Election Day in a postal election, but that the count still take place at 6.00 pm on election day.

9. Polling Places

If the return of votes ends on the last day for mail delivery, before the election, the requirement for a polling place to be open on the day of the election in a postal election could be rescinded.

Recommendation

That the requirement for a polling place to be open on Election Day is rescinded, should recommendation 8 be implemented.

10. Ballot Paper Markings

New technologies are making the electronic counting of votes a possibility, and the numbers involved in postal elections are sufficiently high to justify its use. At present, however, the Act only permits one type of mark, a tick, to be made on the ballot paper.

Recommendation

That marks other than ticks should be authorised on ballot papers for mark sense, OCR or other electronic counting purposes.

11. Checking of Signatures

There is no provision for a check of an elector's signature to be made against an authoritative source.

Recommendation

Provide for the Returning Officer or the Electoral Commissioner to check a signature on an Elector Certificate against an enrolment form or other original document and to reject a vote if the signature does not appear to be that of the elector.

12. Sale of Electoral Roll Information by Local Governments

The *Local Government Act 1995* does not prevent the commercial use of electoral roll information. Enrolment information is confidential and should be used for electoral purposes only.

Recommendation

Provide that electoral roll information should not to be sold for profit by a local government. The *Local Government Act 1995* should be strengthened to permit its use for election purposes only by candidates and members.

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