

FOREWORD

In May 2003, as Electoral Commissioner, I was responsible for the conduct of 55 postal elections and one voting in person election under the *Local Government Act 1995*. By making the Electoral Commissioner responsible for these elections, the local governments concerned ensured that the elections were conducted independently and with impartiality. In addition for those adopting postal voting, the local governments adopted a method of conducting the election that is more convenient for electors and typically achieves a higher rate of voter participation.

Postal elections for local government were first trialed by four local governments in 1995. This increased to eight in 1997, 34 in 1999 and 47 in 2001.

On 3 May 2003, the 55 local governments using the postal method comprised some 1,017,944 electors in 190 wards and of all of the people who voted in the May 2003 local government elections, 92% voted in a postal election. In a short space of time, postal elections have become the dominant means by which electors now choose to participate in local decision-making.

The conduct of these elections is a considerable task for the Commission. The adoption of a range of initiatives in the areas of training and support for returning officers and in centralized computer support for the election preparations assisted in ensuring that timelines were met and outcomes achieved. On 11 July 2002 Benchmark Certification issued a certificate of approval confirming that the Commission's Election Services Branch has implemented a management system complying with the requirements of standard ISO 9001:2000. This is expected to assist in improving services to the Commission's election customers.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of all Commission staff in the planning and conduct of the ordinary elections. In addition, I would like to thank local governments for the assistance and cooperation provided by their staff during the conduct of the elections.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of returning officers for their energy and application towards the successful management and conduct of the election process.

Lyn Auld
ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER

1 December 2003

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	4
ELECTION TIMETABLE	5
RETURNING OFFICERS AND STAFF	6
ADVERTISING	6
ELECTORAL ROLLS.....	8
ELECTION MATERIAL	8
NOMINATIONS	8
ELECTION PACKAGES	11
REPLACEMENT, PROVISIONAL AND ABSENT VOTING.....	13
RETURN OF PACKAGES.....	14
ELECTION DAY	16
RESULTS	17
PARTICIPATION	20
LATE MAIL.....	32
UNCLAIMED MAIL	33
COSTS	33
CANDIDATE SURVEY	33
FUTURE DIRECTIONS	35

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Electoral Commissioner is responsible for conducting postal elections under the *Local Government Act 1995*. If requested, the Electoral Commissioner can also conduct voting in person elections.

In the conduct of these elections, the Electoral Commissioner is able to offer complete impartiality and integrity in the process.

Fifty-five local governments asked the Electoral Commissioner to conduct their ordinary elections using the postal method in May 2003. One local government requested that the voting in person method be used.

At the close of nominations on 3 April 2003, 53 local governments proceeded to election using the postal method. Vacancies for two local governments using the postal method were unopposed and were declared by the returning officer. One local government proceeded to an election using the voting in person method.

The election of a mayor was conducted for ten of the postal voting local governments. The election of a president was conducted for one local government and a plebiscite was conducted for the Town of Vincent. Seven local governments conducted their ordinary elections as a postal election and one local government as a voting in person election for the first time.

The Act provides for the conduct of the ordinary election within an 80-day timetable, with legislative obligations placed on the Electoral Commissioner and the local governments. A copy of the timetable appears in this report.

Returning officers were recruited and appointed by the Electoral Commissioner at the commencement of the election period. Training was provided using Commission staff experienced in local government postal election procedures.

The Act requires the placement of three statutory advertisements in a newspaper with statewide circulation:

- enrolling to vote
- call for nominations
- notice of election.

The Commission placed all statutory advertising in conjunction with the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA), which coordinated the advertising for local governments conducting voting in person elections.

In addition to statutory advertising, the Commission placed promotional advertisements in local and community newspapers with the focus on postal voting. Media releases were provided, giving the opportunity to promote the elections. Many newspapers and radio stations used this material.

Returning officers were provided with manuals and guidelines for the conduct of the election. Candidates were provided with a *Candidate Pack* that included publications prepared by the Commission and the Department of Local Government and Regional Development. A guide to the formality rule for marking ballot papers and guidelines for scrutineers was also included in the *Candidate Pack*.

Candidates and members of council were provided with copies of the residents' roll prepared by the Electoral Commissioner. The owners' and occupiers' roll was prepared by the Chief Executive Officer of the local government and provided to the returning officer for issue to candidates and members of council.

Owners' and occupiers' roll data was electronically merged with data from the residents' roll to form a combined roll to enable dispatch of postal voting election packages to electors.

Of the initial 55 postal elections that the Commission agreed to conduct, a total of 632 candidates nominated for 328 vacancies in 190 wards. Twelve candidates nominated for seven vacancies in one district for the one voting in person election conducted by the Commission.

Of the 53 postal elections that did go to a ballot, a total of 573 candidates contested 269 vacancies. There were 532 candidates for councillor, 39 for mayor and two for president.

There were 258 contested vacancies for councillor, ten for mayor and one for president.

For the voting in person election, there were twelve candidates who contested seven councillor vacancies in the one district.

A total of 907,948 election packages comprising a ballot paper, a ballot paper envelope, a reply paid envelope, an information sheet and profiles of the candidates were sent to electors in 53 postal elections.

Staff from local governments issued replacement and provisional packages. A total of 3,063 replacement packages were issued for the 53 postal elections.

Provisional packages were issued only if electors were omitted from the residents' or owners' and occupiers' rolls. A total of 113 provisional packages were issued.

A total of 317,313 packages were returned by voters.

A postal vote checking centre was established in premises at the Australia Post office in Forrest Place, Perth. Postal voting packages returned by voters were opened, checked and then scanned to mark each voter's name off the roll.

Following scanning, the elector certificates were removed from the ballot paper envelopes. This ensures that the identities of the voters 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 for delivery to local governments.

The Act requires a polling place to be open on polling day and 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. Counting of votes commenced after 6.00 pm on election day, immediately after the close of the poll.

The first-past-the-post method was used for counting in local government elections. Where there were only one or two vacancies, votes were counted manually. Where there were multiple candidates and vacancies, votes were counted using a computer program.

The results of the count were recorded on an election management system in Perth, made available to the media for news coverage on election day and published in *The West Australian* on the Monday.

The results were also published on the Commission's website at www.waec.wa.gov.au and are reproduced at Appendix 10.

The number of electors who return packages measures participation. The average participation rate in May 2003 was 35%. This compares with 38% in May 2001. The average rate of participation is not a good measurement for comparison purposes because larger local governments traditionally do not have a high rate of voter response. A better method of comparison is to compare local governments with similar number of electors.

Of the total number of voters who voted, postal voters accounted for 92%. Thus, only 8% of local government voters actually voted at voting in person elections in 2003.

A total of 5,916 packages were received after the close of the poll for the 53 postal voting elections, an average of 0.65%. Whilst the percentage was not significant, it indicates that some electors were not aware of the time constraints regarding the return of postal voting packages.

A total of 21,430 packages were returned to the Commission as unclaimed mail, an average of 2.36% of all packages dispatched. These addresses were referred to the Australian Electoral Commission or the local government (for owners and occupiers) so that appropriate action could be taken to correct the roll.

The legislation requires the cost of the Electoral Commissioner's conduct of local government elections to be recouped on the basis of full accrual cost recovery. This ensures that the full cost of the elections are met by the respective local governments with the State's contribution being limited to making the professional skills and expertise of the Electoral Commissioner and her staff available to run the elections. It also ensures that no profit is made in the conduct of the election.

Within the constraints of government policy, the Commission seeks to deliver the elections in a price competitive way. In 2003, this was achieved by:

- competitive tendering for services procured as part of the election
- pooling of work to ensure economies of scale in printing, postage and production of election packages
- centralised processing of returned packages in the metropolitan area.

Whilst there is often a focus on the price of the elections, it is important to recognize that a move from voting in person elections to postal elections also typically ensures a substantial increase in turnout and that at least part of the cost increase is related to turnout, rather than to the election method.

The scale of the elections also has an impact with the smallest conducted by the Commission being the Shire of Mount Marshall at 222 electors and the largest being the City of Stirling at 101,936 electors.

A number of costs associated with the elections, such as cost of statutory advertising are fixed regardless of the number of electors, resulting in smaller elections being comparatively more expensive to conduct than those for larger local governments.

Election costs increased in some areas for the May 2003 elections. The Commission was obliged by government policy to review its charging methodology, resulting in some adjustments to the recovery of corporate overheads. An increase in postage costs and a higher than anticipated cost of a printing tender also contributed to the increased cost.

Comparative Statistics 2001 and 2003 Local Government Postal Elections

Ordinary Elections	May 2001 Postal	May 2003 Postal	May 2003 In Person
Local Government Districts	47	55	1
Enrolled electors	946,463	1,017,944	3,643
Referendums/Polls	1	1	0
Mayoral Elections			
Vacancies	8	10	
Elected unopposed	0	0	
Contested	8	10	
Candidates	23	39	
President Elections			
Vacancies		1	
Elected unopposed		0	
Contested		1	
Candidates		2	
Wards			
Vacancies	172	190	1
Contested	129	142	1
Councillor Elections			
Vacancies	286	317	7
Elected unopposed	56	59	0
Contested	229	258	7
Candidates	485	532	12
Positions unfilled	1	0	0
Election Packages			
Dispatched	831,605	907,948	0
Returned at close of poll	315,821	317,313	
Ballot Papers			
Ballot Papers Admitted to the count			1076
Turnout			
Range	30% to 69%	27% to 77%	29.5%
Cost			
*Total cost	\$2,306,510	\$3,104,103	\$24,409

*Excludes GST.

Table 1: Comparative Statistics 2001 and 2003 Local Government Elections. Data Source: EMSWA

INTRODUCTION

Since 1995, the Commission has had an increasing role in the conduct of local government postal elections.

If postal voting is to be used, there must be initial agreement from the Electoral Commissioner and then approval by a special majority of council to conduct elections by that method. Any council may conduct its own voting in person election or ask the Electoral Commissioner to conduct a voting 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 adopting postal elections in 1995, the Commission's involvement in postal elections increased to eight in 1997, 34 in 1999, 47 in 2001 and 55 in 2003.

In 2003, approximately 85.81% of electors used the postal voting method with the majority in the metropolitan area. This compares with 81% in 2001.

The majority of metropolitan local governments have adopted postal voting, with only Bayswater, East Fremantle, Mosman Park and Peppermint Grove using the voting in person method in May 2003.

Local governments which participated in postal elections in 2003 are listed at Appendix 14. The Shires of Dardanup and Waroona did not proceed to an election in 2003 as an equal number of nominations were received for the vacancies.

Of the 55 local governments, seven used the postal voting method for the first time for their ordinary elections. These were:

Shire of Chittering	Shire of Merredin
Shire of Cuballing	Town of Northam
Shire of Dardanup	Shire of Ravensthorpe
City of Fremantle	

The Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley made the Electoral Commissioner responsible for its voting in person election in May 2003. This was the first occasion on which the Electoral Commissioner agreed to conduct such an election for a local government and was undertaken because of the special expertise the Commission could offer in

providing mobile polling services to remote indigenous communities.

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

Planning for 2003

An improved service to local governments at least cost underpins planning for local government ordinary elections. As a consequence, the following initiatives were put into place for the 2003 elections.

Centralised Processing

Checking postal voting packages at a central location is more cost effective than individual multi skilling of staff and access to facilities and resources at the one location provided considerable cost savings to smaller local governments who would otherwise have to bear individual administration costs.

Election Management System

The Commission developed an election management system (EMSWA) to support the business processes of conducting various elections.

The initial phase saw the development of functionality required to support the conduct of local government elections.

EMSWA allows remote processing by returning officers at local government offices or where access to the web is available. The system utilises Microsoft.Net platform under the Object-Oriented-Software-Process (OOSP). Returning officers log on to a central server under strict access protocols and are able to perform all of the functions that previously could only be conducted centrally. Communication between the returning officers and the central server is facilitated using Microsoft's latest version of the software remoting over a secure version of the web.

Internet Reporting Systems

The number of packages returned by voters was published daily on the Commission's website www.waec.wa.gov.au. This was an enhancement of reporting systems and enabled candidates, local governments and other interested persons to monitor the progress of the election. Candidates particularly are becoming more aware of the need to develop effective campaign strategies to ensure that electors return their election packages. The internet reporting system has assisted candidates to achieve their aims during the election.

ELECTION TIMETABLE

The timetable for local government elections is prescribed by the Act. Events are counted back in days from polling day which is the first Saturday

in May every two years. These dates are fixed, which greatly assists planning and preparation.

Key Events

Postal elections demand a high degree of planning to meet the requirements of the election process. There are several key events for the Commission that include:

- close of the roll
- nominations
- printing and dispatch of postal voting election packages
- receipt and checking of postal voting election packages
- polling day, the count and declaration of results.

ELECTION SCHEDULE Local Government Ordinary Elections 3 May 2003

Days to Polling Day	Local Government Act	References to Act/Regs	Day	Date
80	The last day for agreement of the Electoral Commissioner to conduct postal election.	LGA 4.20 (2)(3)(4)	Wed	12/02/2003
80	A decision made to conduct the election as a postal election cannot be rescinded after the 80th day.	LGA 4.61(5)	Wed	12/02/2003
70	The Electoral Commissioner to appoint the Returning Officer for the election.	LGA 4.20 (4)	Sat	22/02/2003
70 to 56	Between the 70th and 56th day the CEO is to give Statewide public notice of the time and date of close of enrolments.	LGA 4.39(2)	Sat to Sat	22/02/2003 to 8/03/2003
56	Advertising may begin for nominations from 56 days and no later than 45 days before election day.	LGA 4.47(1)	Sat	8/03/2003
50	Close of roll at 5.00 pm	LGA 4.39(1)	Fri	14/03/2003
45	Last day for advertisement to be placed calling for nominations.	LGA 4.47(1)	Wed	19/03/2003
44	Nominations Open First day for candidates to lodge completed nomination paper, in the prescribed form, with the Returning Officer. Nominations are open for 15 days.	LGA 4.49(a)	Thu	20/03/2003
36	CEO to prepare an owners' and occupiers' roll for the election. Electoral Commissioner to prepare residents' roll.	LGA 4.41(1) LGA 4.40(2)	Fri	28/03/2003
31	If a candidate's nomination is withdrawn not later than 4.00 pm on the 31st day before election day, the candidate's deposit is to be refunded.	Reg. 27(5)	Wed	2/04/2003
30	Close of Nominations 4.00 pm on the 30th day before election day.	LGA 4.49(a)	Thu	3/04/2003
22	The preparation of any consolidated roll under subregulation (1) is to be completed on or before 22nd day before election day.	Reg. 18(2)	Fri	11/04/2003
22	Correction of Roll The Returning Officer may alter the residents' and owners' and occupiers' rolls.	LGA 4.43(3)	Fri	11/04/2003
19	Last day for the Returning Officer to give Statewide public notice of the election.	LGA 4.64(1)	Mon	14/04/2003
17	Lodgement of election packages with Australia Post.	Approx	Wed	16/04/2003
15	Good Friday	Public Holiday	Fri	18/04/2003
12	Easter Monday	Public Holiday	Mon	21/04/2003
10	Commence processing returned election packages	Approx	Wed	23/04/2003
8	Anzac Day	Public Holiday	Fri	25/04/2003
0	Polling Day Close of poll 6.00 pm	LGA 4.7	Sat	3/05/2003

Post Polling Day	Post Declaration	References to Act/Regs	Date
4	Local public notice of the result.	LGA 4.77	7/05/2003
14	Report to Minister. The report relating to an election under section 4.79 is to be provided to the Minister within 14 days after the declaration of the result of the election.	Reg.81	17/05/2003
28	An invalidity complaint is to be made to the Court of Disputed Returns, constituted by a magistrate, but can only be made within 28 days after notice has been given of the result of the election.	LGA 4.81(1)	31/05/2003

RETURNING OFFICERS AND STAFF

Returning Officers

Recruitment of returning officers commenced in 2002 with the aim of appointing persons who lived locally and were known to their communities. The Commission was interested in persons who were highly organised with strong interpersonal, communication and computing skills.

Several persons were selected as reserve returning officers with the aim of ensuring that they were available to act for existing returning officers where required and to assist in the election process. One reserve was requested to step in as returning officer at short notice, due to a family emergency.

Several staff from the Commission with substantial experience in local government elections were appointed as deputy returning officers, particularly in areas such as the postal vote checking centre.

Training of returning officers was provided by three staff from the Commission who had received the qualification of *Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment and Training*.

Returning officers attended training sessions in the months of February, March and April 2003, timed to coincide with election events such as nominations and polling day.

Returning officers and deputy returning officers are listed at Appendix 11.

Administrative Staff

Election processes are labour intensive. A large number of casual staff were employed at the postal vote checking centre in Perth. Staff were employed in teams with specific responsibilities up to and including election day.

On election day, staff were employed to count ballot papers received immediately prior to and on election day for country local governments. Counting commenced after 6.00 pm and was managed to ensure that results in Perth were

available early to coincide with results at those country local governments.

Local governments were asked to make their staff available for the issue of replacement and provisional voting papers. In addition, staff from local governments worked at the polling place on election day and were employed to count ballot papers after 6.00 pm.

ADVERTISING

Statutory Advertising

The Act provides for the placement of three statutory advertisements in a newspaper with statewide circulation. The Commission placed all statutory advertising in conjunction with WALGA, which coordinated the advertising for local governments conducting voting in person elections.

The first advertisement was a *Notice of Close of Enrolments*, which appeared in *The West Australian* on Wednesday 26 February 2003 in accordance with section 4.39(2) of the Act.

The second advertisement was a *Call for Nominations*, which appeared in *The West Australian* on Wednesday 12 March 2003 in accordance with section 4.47(1) of the Act.

The third advertisement was a *Notice of Election*, which appeared in *The West Australian* on Friday 11 April 2003 in accordance with section 4.64(1) of the Act.

The *Notice of Results* is not required to be placed in a newspaper with statewide publication, however, this was placed in *The West Australian* on Monday 5 May 2003.

Supplementary Statutory Advertising

Fifty-two local governments took up the option of placing the three statutory advertisements in local newspapers. Each local advertisement was published in local newspapers in the week following the statutory advertisements and carried specific messages designed to draw attention to a specific stage of the election process.

Non Statutory Advertising

In addition to supplementary statutory advertising, the Commission developed a communications campaign aimed at increasing public awareness of postal elections. The campaign was developed and segmented into phases that carried messages reminding electors and voters of the election process currently occurring.

Local governments were offered the opportunity to place promotional advertisements in local papers and *The West Australian*.

Media

The Commission focused media releases on those local governments that changed to postal voting for the first time for the 2003 elections or who had reverted back to postal voting. This two-phase approach included providing information about the local council, the advantages of postal voting, when to expect election packages and how to vote.

WAEC Website

Each participating local government had a visual presence on the Commission's web site www.waec.wa.gov.au 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.

Key events in the election timetable recorded higher than normal visits to the Commission's website. This compares with average visits of around 7,400 per month.

Month	Key Event	Visits
March	Nominations opened	11,135
April	Nominations closed	10,461
May	Election day	13,062

Importantly, the election results were available to the public on the Internet on election night.

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 public.



Figure 1: Local Government Postal Election results on the Western Australian Electoral Commission Website.

ELECTORAL ROLLS

Close of the Roll

Prior to the close of the roll on 14 March 2003, a number of local government boundary changes were implemented that included:

- abolition of wards 12
- full redistribution of wards 13
- amalgamation of wards 1
- change of ward boundaries 12
- change of district boundaries 3

Significant problems were encountered by the Commission with the late gazettal of these changes in January and February 2003. Initiatives are being explored with the Department of Local Government and Regional Development and the Department of Land Information to improve on this process for subsequent elections.

When the rolls closed, there were 1,206,086 electors on the roll.

Electronic Rolls

Rolls were produced on CD and made available as soon as possible after roll close to ensure that candidates had the opportunity to use them for their election campaign when nominations opened.

Candidates and members of council were provided with one free copy of the residents' roll and the owners' and occupiers' roll on request.

Paper Rolls

Candidates who required a paper roll instead of an electronic roll advised their returning officer. The Commission printed and forwarded the roll within 24 hours of receiving the request from the returning officer.

Privacy

There are legislative requirements which direct the distribution of the electoral roll including the:

- *Electoral Act 1907* and *Electoral Regulations 1996*
- *Local Government Act 1995* and *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*.

In addition there is growing concern in the community about the privacy of information held by government agencies.

In the absence of state privacy legislation, the Commission is cognisant of the intent of the Commonwealth *Privacy Act 1988* which is to:

- protect the use of peoples' personal information which could affect individuals' lives in critical ways
- ensure individuals' information is accurate
- ensure individuals' information is not to be transmitted without their knowledge.

These concerns are drawn to attention on each occasion that rolls are provided for electoral purposes.

ELECTION MATERIAL

Manuals

Manuals and guidelines for the conduct of the election were provided to returning officers.

Candidate Packs

Candidates were provided with a *Candidate Pack* that included publications by the Commission and the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, along with a guide to the formality rules for marking ballot papers.

Forms

Forms for the election were designed by Commission staff and issued to returning officers, candidates and scrutineers. The *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997* provide 23 forms to be used for various electoral functions under the Regulations.

NOMINATIONS

Nominations opened on 20 March 2003 and closed at 4.00 pm on 3 April 2003.

Candidates

A total of 632 candidates nominated for 328 vacancies in 190 wards in 55 postal elections. At the close of nominations on 3 April 2003, there were 269 contested vacancies and 59 unopposed vacancies. A total of 573 candidates contested the 269 vacancies. There were 532 candidates for councillor, 39 for mayor and two for president. There were 258 contested vacancies for councillor, ten for mayor and one for president.

Twelve candidates nominated for seven vacancies in one district for the one voting in person election. At the close of nominations, the seven vacancies were all contested. Twelve candidates contested the seven councillor vacancies.

All vacancies were filled.

The Nominations Process

Nominations opened on 20 March 2003 and were received by returning officers. A complete nomination includes:

- nomination form
- candidate profile
- \$80 nomination deposit
- photograph (optional).

Returning officers were instructed not to process a nomination until it was complete. Candidate profiles were checked to ensure compliance with the provisions of regulation 24.

The original copy of the profile was placed on the notice board of the local government with a photograph of the candidate (if provided). Other nomination papers were forwarded to the Commission for printing in a standardised format and inclusion in a postal voting election package.

Nominations closed at 4.00 pm on 3 April 2003. Returning officers were present at the local government offices from 2.00 pm (or earlier if required) to accept final nominations from candidates.

After nominations closed, the returning officer conducted a draw for position on the ballot paper. This was followed by a short briefing to candidates and scrutineers, designed to explain the process that would follow in this election.

Candidates were also given information on the procedures for the postal vote checking centre and the counting locations.

Candidate Profiles

The Commission developed a database for the receipt, input and recording of candidate profiles to ensure compliance with the provisions of regulation 24.

The profiles were forwarded electronically to the printer for printing in a standard format.

Candidates preferred to lodge their profiles with the returning officer. Only 6% of candidates opted to use electronic mail to lodge their profiles. Of this number, only 1.2% of candidates used the electronic form available on the Commission's website www.waec.wa.gov.au.

Candidates continue to prepare their profiles with extensive use of hyphenated words, spelling mistakes and incorrect use of grammar. The Commission uses the Macquarie dictionary to clarify the use of hyphenated words. Obvious spelling mistakes were corrected, however, grammar was not.

Six-hundred and forty-four profiles were received in 2003, 80 more than the 2001 ordinary election. Whilst this increase is commensurate with a higher number of postal voting local governments in 2003, the trend is that candidates are prepared to defer nominating to the last day. In 2003, 218 nominations were received on the last day which compares with 141 nominations in 2001.

The trend in deferring lodgement of nominations to the last day has some implications for the Commission in planning for the close of nominations, particularly if the number of local governments using the postal election method continues to increase.

Unopposed and Uncontested Wards

At the close of nominations on 3 April 2003, 48 of the 190 wards with vacancies for postal elections received an equal number of candidates and these candidates were declared elected unopposed.

From a total of 328 vacancies, 59 candidates were elected unopposed for postal elections.

All vacancies were contested for the one voting in person election.

All vacancies were filled.

Complaints

The Act provides that either the Electoral Commissioner or the returning officer may investigate whether misconduct, malpractice or maladministration has occurred in relation to an election. The Electoral Commissioner's powers are not limited to elections conducted by the Commissioner.

Approximately 100 complaints were received during the May 2003 ordinary elections. The majority were in connection with:

- section 4.87 – Printing and publication of election material
- section 4.88 – Misleading, false and defamatory statements
- election procedure.

All of the complaints were reviewed to determine if a breach of the Act had occurred and whether further action was warranted.

In many instances, no evidence of any breach was found and the complainant was so advised. Alternatively, the breach was of a technical nature and the matter was resolved by drawing to the attention of those concerned the legislative requirements for future reference.

Two allegations about potentially stolen election packages were investigated but no evidence was found to indicate that any offence had occurred.

At the time of concluding this report, an investigation into a possible breach of section 4.87 was ongoing.

A further investigation into potential voting offences was also still proceeding.

Gender of Candidates

In 2003, 472 males and 160 females nominated for vacancies in postal voting local governments. Of that number, 249 males and 79 females were elected to vacancies.

A comparison with 2001 is shown below for postal elections:

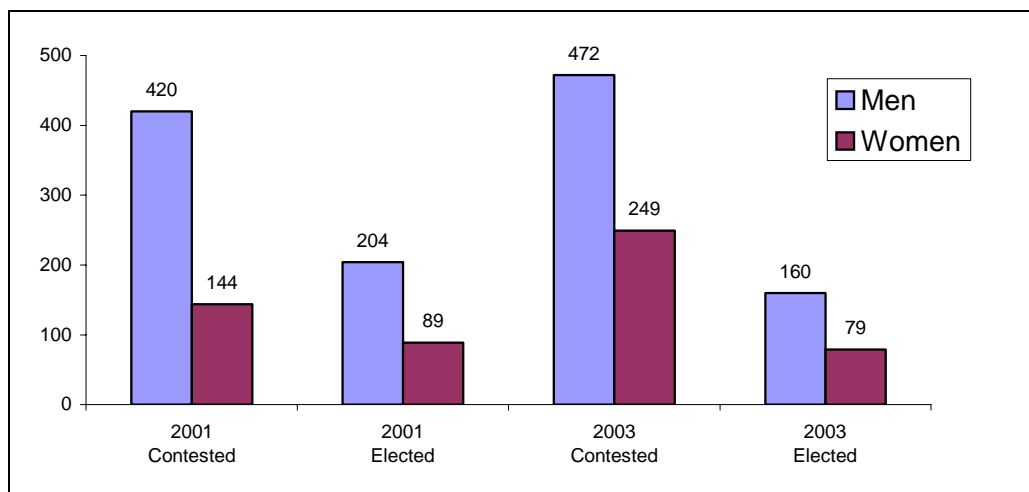


Chart 1: Candidates by Gender for Postal Voting Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

Women comprised 25.32% of candidates. This was marginally less when compared to 2001 (25.53%). The proportion of women who were elected is 1.23% less than the proportion standing for election.

For the one voting in person local government, five men and seven women contested the vacancies. Of this, four men and three women were elected.

Age of Candidates

In 2003, the average age of candidates was 52 with an age range from 18 to 81 for postal voting

local governments. In 2001, the average age was 51 with an age range between 23 and 93.

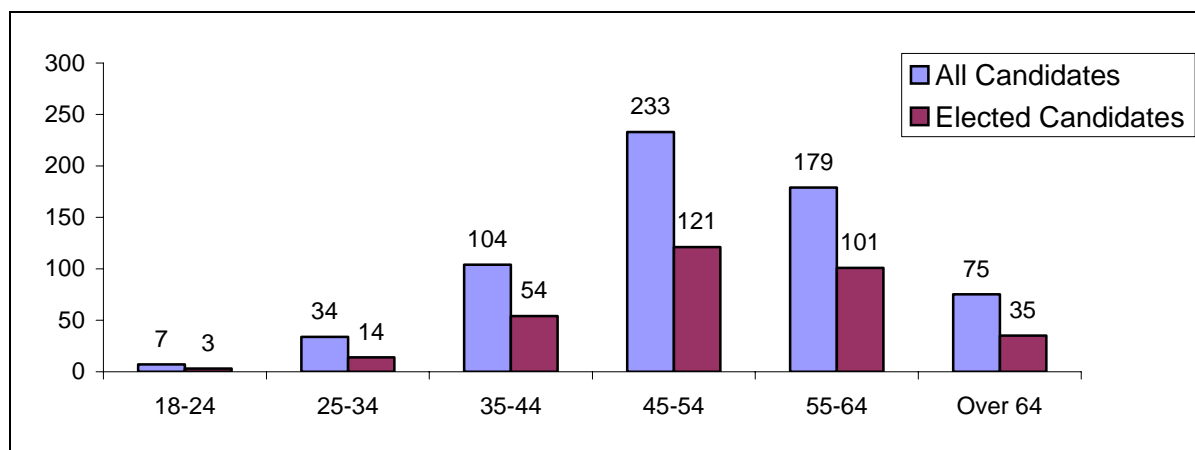


Chart 2: Candidates by Age Group for Postal Voting Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

For the one voting in person local government, the average age was 51 with an age range from 32 to 66.

ELECTION PACKAGES

Election Package Design

Package design is important as electors may overlook that an election is occurring and discard their mail. In 2003, the design focused that this was a local government election and a postal vote was included in the envelope.



Figure 2: Package Design

The package comprised six separate parts:

1. ballot paper
2. postal vote information
3. candidate profiles
4. ballot paper envelope
5. dispatch envelope
6. reply paid return envelope.

Ballot Paper

Printing of ballot papers include a combination of screens and ink colours. Unauthorised reproduction results in the words 'illegal copy' appearing on the paper.

Authenticity of the ballot paper in accordance with regulation 45(5) included the printing of the words 'Western Australian Electoral Commission' as the background to both sides of the ballot paper.

A printing mark was placed on the back of the ballot paper to assist electoral staff when handling ballot papers. When ballot papers are placed face down, the printing mark identifies the top of the ballot paper. Sorting is assisted in this way and saves considerable time when they are counted after 6.00 pm on election day.

Postal Vote Information

The information brochure is customised for each local government and is designed with a view to guiding the elector through the process of completing a postal vote.

The brochure is written in plain English with brief instructions. Basic information is also provided in a range of community languages.

Candidate Profiles

The profiles of the candidates were printed in a standard format with a photograph (if supplied by the candidate).

The profiles complied with the requirements of regulation 24(b) and included contact details if electors wished to make further enquiries of the candidates before completing their vote.

Ballot Paper Envelope

This envelope was standardised for all local governments. The ballot paper is inserted into the envelope and sealed by the elector. A certificate attached to the envelope is then completed by the elector who makes a declaration in accordance with regulation 43(1)(e) of the Regulations.

If the elector has changed their address or other details, this could be recorded on the reverse of the certificate.

The image shows the front of an elector's certificate. It includes a barcode with the number 103121012403, the City of Gosnells logo, and the elector's name and address: Mr R Jones, 11 Central Avenue, GOSNELLS WA 6106. A declaration box contains the text: '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)'. There are fields for 'Date' and 'Signature'. The form is titled 'Elector's Certificate Form 14' and references 'Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997, reg. 43(1)(e)'. A note at the bottom says 'CHANGED YOUR ADDRESS? (COMPLETE ON REVERSE OF THIS CERTIFICATE)'.

Figure 3: Front of elector's certificate

The image shows the back of the elector's certificate. It features a table with the heading 'Has your name or address changed?'. The table has three rows: 'New name', 'New residential address', and 'New postal address'. The 'New residential address' and 'New postal address' rows have a 'Postcode' field to their right.

Figure 4: Back of elector's certificate

Dispatch Envelope

This envelope is used to post the election package to electors. The envelope has a large window to allow the elector address and Australia Post barcode to be viewed easily. The address of the Commission is provided for the return of unclaimed mail.

Reply Paid Return Envelope

This envelope is used by the voter to post the ballot paper envelope (with elector certificate attached) to the returning officer for that local government. Australia Post direct the envelopes to the Commission and deliver them to the postal vote checking centre in the period leading up to

election day. For country local governments, arrangements are made for Australia Post to direct the envelopes to the returning officer for processing locally at the polling place immediately prior to and on election day.

Election Package Dispatch

907,948 packages were dispatched to electors in 142 wards in 53 postal elections.

Packages were printed and packaged for each ward, necessitating a high level of quality control to ensure that each elector received the correct package.

Dispatch and Return Period

Country and remote local government electors were given 2–3 weeks to return their ballot papers to the postal vote checking centre. Metropolitan electors were allowed a two-week period. Most metropolitan electors received their packages a day after posting.

66% of all electors returned their packages within the first week of receiving them.

REPLACEMENT, PROVISIONAL AND ABSENT VOTING

Local government staff were trained by the returning officer to issue replacement, provisional or absent votes to electors. Statistics on the number of replacement and provisional votes issued in each district are provided at Appendix 4. Statistics were not kept for absent votes issued by postal voting local governments for voting in person local governments.

Replacement Voting

The period for the issue of replacement voting papers commenced on the day after the election packages were dispatched and ended at 6.00 pm on election day.

Electors could obtain replacement voting papers by visiting the local government offices or the Electoral Commission, or by making a request for an application form over the telephone.

Electors were required to complete a declaration if a ballot paper or ballot paper envelope or a complete election package was requested.

Local government staff were trained by the returning officer to issue replacement votes. All election material for this purpose was provided by the Commission.

3,063 replacement voting papers were issued for 53 postal voting local governments in 2003, an average of 58 per local government. This compares with 1,841 replacement voting papers for 45 local governments in 2001, an average of 41 per local government.

Eight local governments recorded higher than normal increases in the demand for replacement voting papers.

For example, the City of Albany recorded an increase of 252% and was mainly attributed to older voters who said that they preferred to vote in person rather than post their election package. As a result, they discarded their election packages and requested a replacement at the polling place on election day.

The Town of Cottesloe recorded an increase of 226% which was attributed to vigorous campaigning of workers assisting with the election of the mayor, an election conducted by the Council using the voting in person method.

Voters who lodged a vote for the election of the mayor were encouraged to vote for the election of councillors and this contributed to a significant demand for replacement voting papers.

Provisional Voting

The period for the issue of provisional voting papers commenced on the day after the election packages were dispatched and ended at 6.00 pm on election day.

All provisional electors were required to complete a declaration by visiting the local government or the Electoral Commission.

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

Local government staff were trained by the returning officer to issue provisional votes. All election material for this purpose was provided by the Commission.

One-hundred and thirteen provisional voting papers were issued for 43 postal voting local governments in 2003. This compares with 206 provisional voting papers in 2001.

Absent Voting

An elector who wished to cast an absent vote for an election conducted by the voting in person method could do so at any local government.

Absent voting started on the day of the election notice (11 April 2003) and ended on the 4th day before election day (29 April 2003).

Local government staff were trained by the returning officer to issue absent votes. All election material for this purpose was provided by the Commission.

RETURN OF PACKAGES

Postal Vote Checking Centre

The Australia Post office in Forrest Place, Perth was used as a postal vote checking centre with security and accessibility for visitors.

Casual staff were employed in teams to process ballot paper envelopes returned by voters.

Of the 907,948 packages sent to electors, voters returned 317,313, a response rate of 35%.

Election Management System

EMSWA was developed initially for the management of the local government elections in 2003.

In a centralised facility EMSWA was utilised for:

- scanning of all elector barcodes to mark names of voters off the roll
- recording the issue of replacement and provisional ballot papers
- recording the number of election packages received from voters
- recording the number of ballot papers that were to be counted on election day
- recording the results of the election following the count.

Return of Packages

Mail was delivered daily to the postal vote checking centre by Australia Post on a daily basis.

The following graph illustrates the trend for the return of packages.

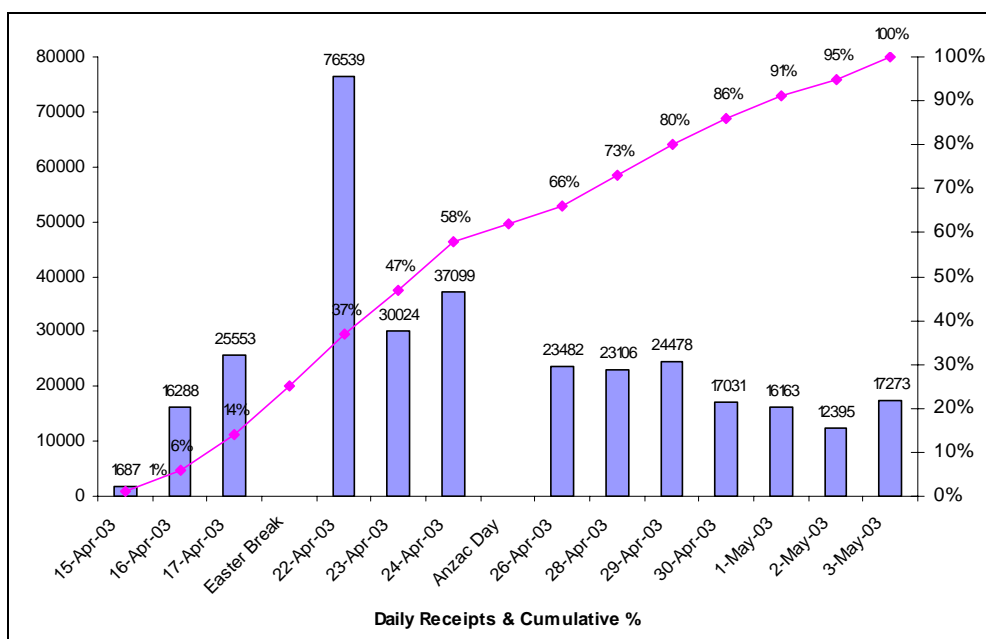


Chart 3: Postal Vote Package Receipts from Australia Post. Data Source: EMSWA

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

Approximately 66% of packages were returned to the postal vote checking centre by the end of the first week. This is consistent with 2001.

The Commission placed this information on its website www.waec.wa.gov.au. This information is useful for candidates and local governments. Strategies can be put in place after the first week to create further awareness of the election if it appears that there will be a low participation.

Checking Process

A considerable amount of pre-processing is required to admit a postal vote to the count. This includes:

- receipt of ballot paper envelopes from voters on a daily basis
- opening the reply paid envelopes and checking the elector's certificate
- rejecting envelopes that are not completed in accordance with regulation 43(1)(e)
- scanning the barcodes to mark each elector's name off the roll
- compiling records and statistics of returned envelopes and rejected envelopes
- posting information on the Commission's website www.waec.wa.gov.au
- 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 voter'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.

Audits

Returned envelopes were checked to ensure that voters completed their declaration in accordance with regulation 43(1) (e).

Candidates and Scrutineers

Candidates and their scrutineers were given the option of visiting the postal vote checking centre to view the postal voting process. Local government staff were also invited to attend the centre.

Change of Details

Voters who changed their name and/or address could complete the reverse of the elector's certificate.

Changes advised in relation to residents were forwarded to the Australian Electoral Commission to allow action to be taken to update the residents' roll.

Changes in relation to owners and occupiers were returned to each local government after the election for follow up.

These procedures assist in maintaining accuracy of the rolls.

Recording Replacement and Provisional Packages

Each local government provided information to the postal vote checking centre regarding replacement and provisional packages issued.

The roll was updated accordingly. 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.

Multiple Voting

EMSWA was designed to identify instances when electors attempted to vote more than once.

A total of 52 electors were found to have lodged more than one election package. Following investigation, 29 electors were sent a 'please explain' letter.

Multiple voting constitutes an offence under section 4.66 of the Act.

Rejected Packages

Some returned packages could not be accepted. The principal 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 2003 with 2001.

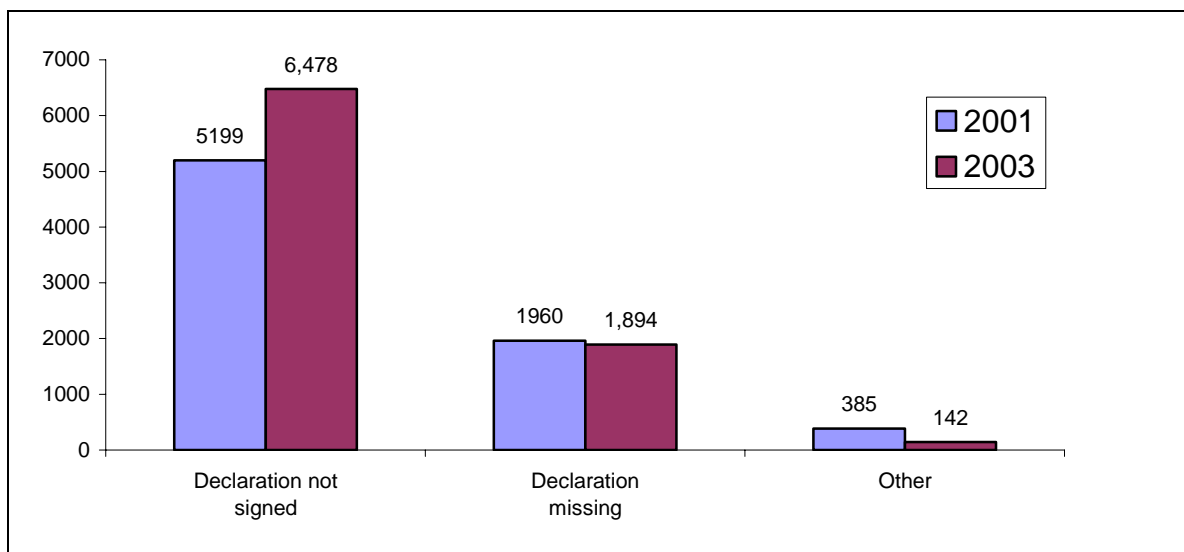


Chart 4: Rejected Packages in 2003 and 2001. Data Source: EMSWA

In 2003, 8,514 or 2.68% of packages were rejected from the total of 317,313 packages returned. This is consistent with 2001 when 7,544 or 2.38% of packages were rejected from the total of 315,821 packages returned.

6,478 voters did not sign the elector's certificate in 2003. This is significant because the voter may have completed their vote in good faith but could not have their vote counted because of an oversight.

Dispatch of Ballot Boxes to Counting Centres

Prior to polling day, sealed ballot boxes containing ballot papers were dispatched from the postal vote checking centre under secure conditions to all returning officers. On polling day, the returning officers added ballot papers processed at the polling place to the total of ballot papers already in the boxes. The ballot boxes remained sealed until 6.00 pm when the count could commence.

ELECTION DAY

Polling Places

One polling place must be open on polling day in each local government. In the main, the polling places were at the offices of the local government.

The following local governments had more than one polling place open on election day:

- Shire of Cuballing
- Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley (voting in person).

Staff at polling places issued replacement and provisional voting packages. Voters who did not post their packages to the postal vote checking centre could deliver their ballot paper envelopes to the returning officer for processing.

Packages Received on Election Day

A total of 10,827 election packages were received on polling day at the local government offices, 3.4% of all packages received. This has implications for some local governments as considerable pressure is placed on polling staff who were busy issuing replacement and provisional ballot papers and attending to enquiries from electors.

Some electors continue to be confused about the polling place on election day believing that it is possible to lodge a vote in person. This occurred more frequently in local governments that had not previously conducted their elections by post.

Counting of the votes

The first-past-the-post count method is used for the counting of votes in local government elections.

A candidate who receives the most votes is elected.

Voters can mark their ballot papers up to the number of candidates to be elected.

In most local governments, the count was conducted manually.



Figure 5: Sorting of ballot papers prior to the computer count, City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, May 2003

Where the number of candidates and vacancies were several, the Commission determined that a computer count was necessary. This type of count has a high degree of accuracy for the more complex counts. Data entry staff are used to key each vote for a candidate on a ballot paper. The

software program tallies each entry per candidate to arrive at a result.

Local governments that used a computer count included:

- Shire of Busselton
- Shire of Capel
- Shire of Chittering
- Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup
- City of Geraldton
- City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder
- Town of Kwinana
- City of Mandurah
- Shire of Merredin
- City of Swan
- City of Perth
- Town of Vincent
- Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley (voting in person election).



Figure 6: Votes processed using computers at the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, May 2003

At the end of each count for election of mayor or councillor, the returning officer declared the result.

RESULTS

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

An election management system was developed for the recording of the results which were then verified before being transmitted to WALGA, the Australian Broadcasting Commission and posted to the Commission's internet site www.waec.wa.gov.au.

The results were published in *The West Australian* on Monday 5 May 2003.

The *Reports to Minister* (Form 20) and statistics on the candidates and participation rates were produced from the Commission’s election management system.

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



Figure 7: Returning officer John Manning declaring the result of elections, City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, May 2003

vacancies filled, sitting councillors were elected to 150 positions (45.73%) while other candidates were elected to 178 positions (54.27%).

70.42% of the sitting candidates for postal voting local governments were re-elected. This compares with 77.9% in 2001.

Of the twelve candidates who nominated for the one voting in person local government, four were sitting councillors (33.33%). Of the seven vacancies filled, sitting councillors were elected to four positions (57.14%) while other candidates were elected to three positions (42.86%). One-hundred percent of the sitting candidates were re-elected.

Sitting Members

Of the 632 candidates who nominated for elections in postal voting local governments, 213 were sitting councillors (33.7%). Of the 328

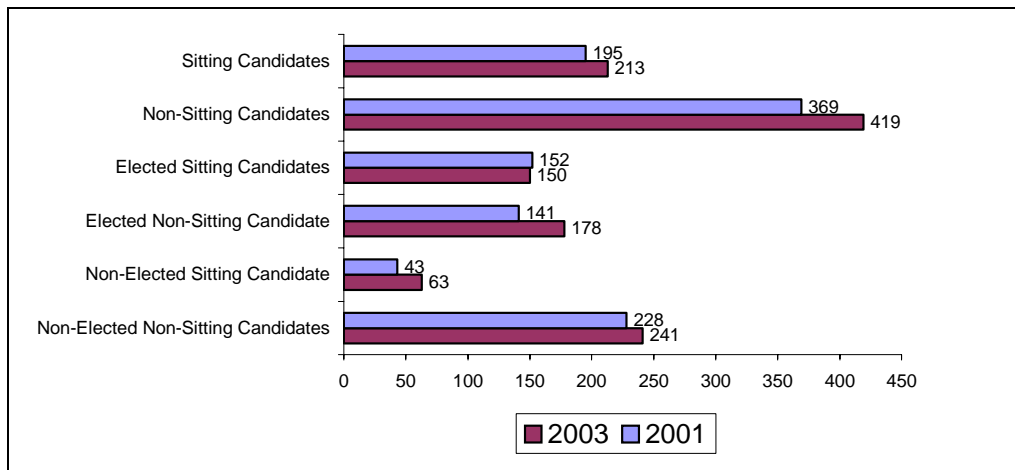


Chart 5: A Comparison of the Electoral Success of Sitting and Non-sitting Members in 2003 and 2001. Data Source: EMSWA

Sitting councillors who sought another term in local government in the 2003 elections were again recognised by voters. The majority who were seeking re-election were successful.

Candidate Statistics

The table below provides summary candidate statistics for postal voting local governments.

	Councillor	Mayor/President	Total
Vacancies	317	11	328
Vacancies Filled Unopposed	59	0	59
Vacancies Uncontested	0	0	0
Vacancies Contested	258	11	269
Total Candidates at Close of Nominations	591	41	632
Male Candidates	443	29	472
Female Candidates	148	12	160
Vacancies Elected Unopposed	59	0	59
Male Candidates Elected Unopposed	45	0	45
Female Candidates Elected Unopposed	14	0	14
Total Candidates in Contested Elections	532	41	573
Male Candidates in Contested Elections	398	29	427
Female Candidates in Contested Elections	134	12	146
Total Candidates Elected	287	41	328
Males Elected	241	8	249
Females Elected	76	3	79
Male Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	196	8	204
Female Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	62	3	65
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-Nominating	199	14	213
Sitting Councillors/Mayors not Re-Nominating	88	27	115
Total Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-Elected	143	7	150
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-elected in Contested Elections	111	7	118
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-elected Unopposed	32	0	32
Sitting Councillors/Mayors not Re-elected	56	7	63

Table 2: Summary Candidate Statistics. Data Source: EMSWA

The table below provides summary candidate statistics for one voting in person voting local government.

	Councillor
Vacancies	7
Vacancies Filled Unopposed	0
Vacancies Uncontested	0
Vacancies Contested	7
Total Candidates at Close of Nominations	12
Male Candidates	5
Female Candidates	7
Vacancies Elected Unopposed	0
Male Candidates Elected Unopposed	0
Female Candidates Elected Unopposed	0
Total Candidates in Contested Elections	12
Male Candidates in Contested Elections	5
Female Candidates in Contested Elections	7
Total Candidates Elected	7
Males Elected	4
Females Elected	3
Male Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	4
Female Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	3
Sitting Councillors Re-Nominating	4
Sitting Councillors not Re-Nominating	3
Total Sitting Councillors Re-Elected	4
Sitting Councillors Re-elected in Contested Elections	4
Sitting Councillors Re-elected Unopposed	0
Sitting Councillors not Re-elected	0

Table 3: Summary Candidate Statistics. Data Source: EMSWA

PARTICIPATION

Appendix 14 compares enrolment and voter participation for local governments using the postal method in 2003 and 2001.

A number of postal voting local governments recorded a decrease in their participation rate in 2003 when compared to 2001. This may be due to

several factors, which have not been examined in this report. The following statistics are of interest:

Number of local governments	Decrease in participation %
1	17
1	14
2	13
1	12
1	11
2	10
1	7
4	6
4	5
3	4
2	3
6	2
5	1
1	Less than 1

Table 4: Decrease in participation in 2003. Data Source: EMSWA

The decrease in the participation rate is not attributed to a lack of voter interest. Rather, some of the wards in these local governments did not go to a full election. When the total of voters are compared across two elections, this decrease has the effect of lowering the participation rate.

Conversely, some postal voting local governments increased their participation in 2003, as follows:

Number of local governments	Increase in participation %
1	1
2	2
2	3
3	4

Table 5: Increase in participation 2003. Data Source: EMSWA

Elections for mayor, president and a referendum traditionally generate an increase of voter interest in the community.

A comparison of local governments that elected a mayor in 2003 generally reflects this trend with a higher level of interest in the country than in the metropolitan area.

Local Government	2001 voter participation	2003 voter participation
City of Albany	47.7%	49.0%
Town of Cambridge	43.2%	41.2%
City of Joondalup	29.7%	26.9%
City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder	34.7%	38.2%
City of Melville	37.5%	39.7%
City of Nedlands	35.2%	39.4%
City of Perth	46.4%	50.9%
Town of Victoria Park	35.9%	35.7%
Town of Vincent	39.7%	37.1%
City of Wanneroo	34.5%	29.2%

Table 6: Election of Mayor – comparison in participation. Data Source: EMSWA

The Shire of Carnarvon elected a president for the first time in 2003 with a participation rate of 40.8%, considerably lower than 46.6% in 2001. This lack of interest in the community is difficult to explain given that enrolment and voter participation for 2003 and 2001 were comparatively similar.

The Town of Vincent elected a mayor in 2001 and 2003 and also held a referendum in 2003. This should have generated higher community interest but the result is consistent with the trend towards lower voter interest in the metropolitan area.

Local governments with an elector base in excess of 40,000 are compared in the following chart for postal elections in 2003 and 2001. The trend towards lower voter interest (with the exception of the City of Melville) is evident and confined to the metropolitan area.

Local Government	2001 voter participation	2003 voter participation
City of Gosnells	32.2%	29.9%
City of Joondalup	29.7%	26.9%
City of Melville	37.5%	39.7%
City of Rockingham	36.4%	32.1%
City of Stirling	35.1%	31.8%

Table 7: Elector base in excess of 40,000 – comparison in participation. Data Source: EMSWA

The following local governments, new to the postal voting method in 2003, recorded greatly increased participation rates as compared to 2001. This is illustrated in the next chart.

Local Government	2001 Voting in person election	2003 Postal Election
Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes	31.0%	46.2%
Shire of Chittering	36.1%	58.6%
City of Fremantle	32.4%	44.3%
Town of Northam	33.4%	39.2%
Shire of Ravensthorpe	56.6%	67.0%

Table 8: Comparative Statistics – Change from Voting in Person to Postal Voting. Data Source: EMSWA

Local governments that used the postal method in 2001 and reverted back to the in person method of voting in 2003 recorded a decrease in their participation rate:

Local Government	2001 Postal Election	2003 Voting in person election
Shire of Yilgarn	60.8%	26.0%
Shire of Cue	65.3%	58.3%

Table 9: Comparative Statistics – Change from Postal Voting to Voting in Person. Data Source: EMSWA

In comparison to voting 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 2003, a total of 317,313 postal voting election packages were returned. 91.96% of eligible local government electors used the postal method of voting with an average participation rate of 35%. The 8.04% of local government electors using the voting in person method of voting produced an average participation rate of 22.04%. An average figure is not strictly comparable as different districts, wards and elector numbers were involved.

Participation rates for voting in person elections were 19.3% in 1999, 25.9% in 2001 and 22.04% in 2003.

A full comparison between local governments who used the postal election process in 2003 and 2001 is at Appendix 14.

Participation Ratio for Metropolitan and Country Districts

Of the 317,313 postal voting electors in 2003, 78.7% were from metropolitan local governments and 21.2% from country local governments. This compares with 2001, when 313,812 postal voters returned packages, with 78.3% in the metropolitan area and 21.7% in the country.

The City of Perth recorded the highest metropolitan participation rate in 2003 with 50.9%. This compares with 46.4% in 2001.

The City of Joondalup recorded the lowest metropolitan participation rate in 2003 with 26.9%. This compares with 29.7% in 2001.

Because local governments vary in size and the number of wards, comparisons between them is not particularly useful. A better method is to compare local governments with similar enrolment and number of wards contested.

Participation Rates for Metropolitan Local Governments

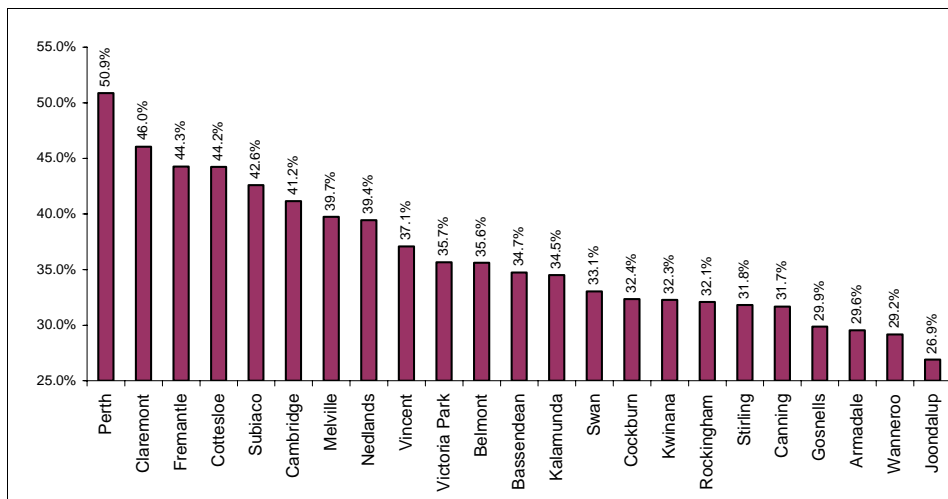


Chart 6: Participation Rate – Metropolitan Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

Participation Rates for Country Local Governments

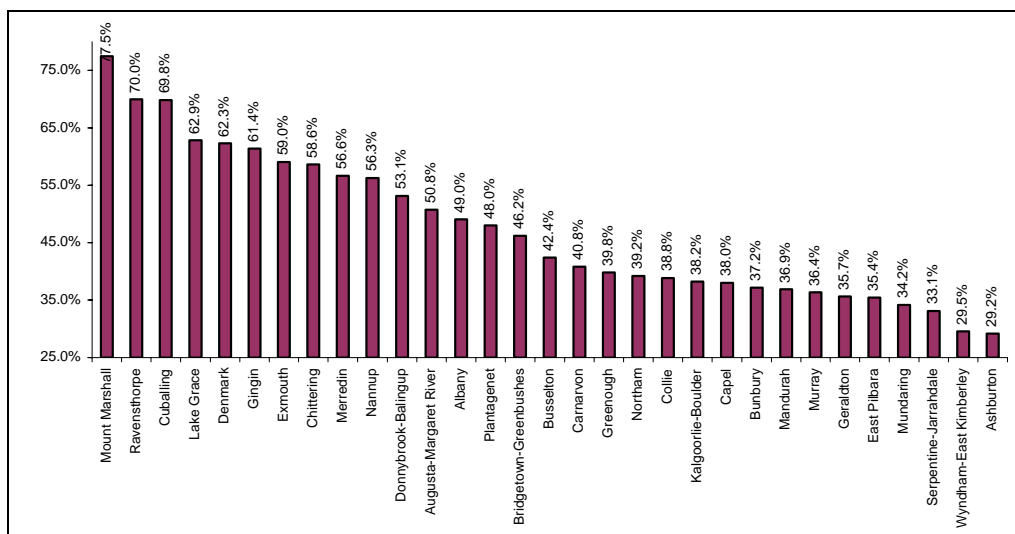


Chart 7: Participation Rate – Country Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

The Shire of Mount Marshall recorded the highest participation rate (77.5%) for country local governments in 2003. It is not possible to compare this with 2001 as councillors in the Shire were elected unopposed.

The Shire of Ashburton recorded the lowest participation rate (29.2%) for country local

governments in 2003. This compares with 40.8% in 2001.

Age of Electors and Voters

The Commission uses twelve age groups for comparison purposes. This is illustrated in the following chart.

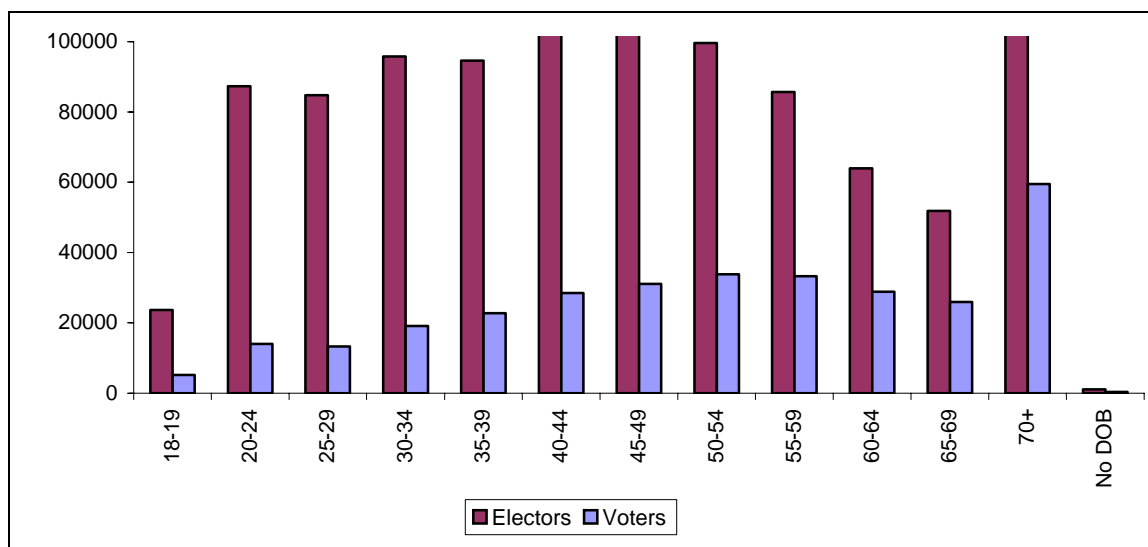


Chart 8: Age of Electors and Voters. Data Source: EMSWA

Following the introduction of postal voting and the availability of data, it is now possible to ascertain the emergence of trends in enrolment and voting.

In 2001 postal voting recorded lower voter participation (%) when compared to enrolment in the following age groups:

- 18–19
- 20–24
- 25–29
- 30–34
- 35–39
- 40–44.

In 2003, the same trend is evident but now includes the 45–49 age groups.

In the following age groups, a higher voter participation (%) was recorded in 2001 when compared to enrolment:

- 50–54
- 55–59
- 60–64

- 65–69
- 70+.

The same trend is evident for 2003.

In 1999, the Commission observed that younger electors appeared to be less interested in voting in local government elections than those aged 45 and over. The 2001 results supported this observation which re-occurs in 2003. This 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.

Age and Gender of Electors and Voters

Gender is represented almost equally on the electoral roll for the 2003 elections. Women account for 51.5% of electors and 52.1% of

voters. Men account for 48.5% of electors and 47.3% of voters.

In 2001, women represented 51.2% of electors and 52.4% of voters. Men represented 48.8% of electors and 47.6% of voters.

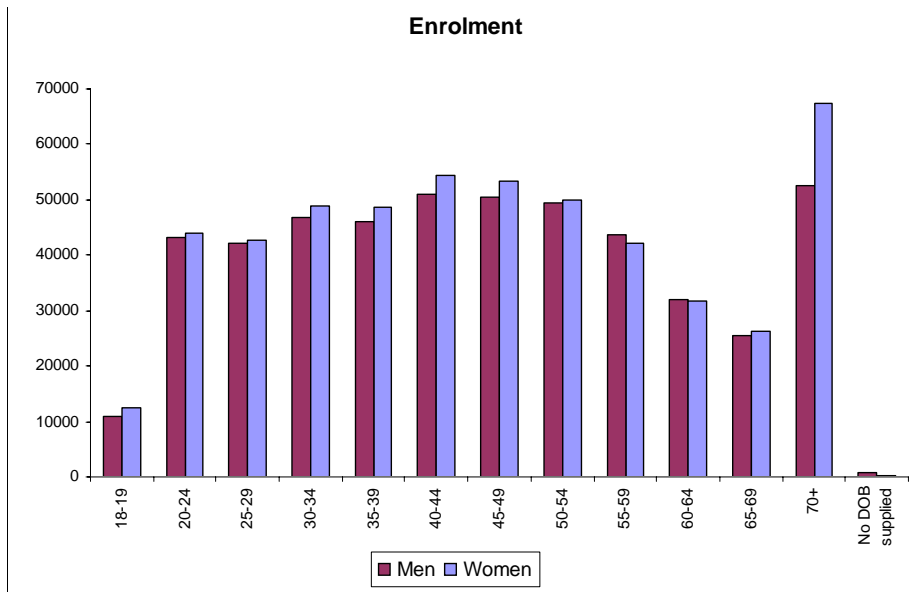


Chart 9: Enrolment by Age Group and Gender. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth or gender was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

Women continue to demonstrate a high interest in voting for local government elections with a difference of between 4% to 5% as compared to men for the 2001 and 2003 elections. However, this

is not being translated into representation in local government. The number of women elected in 2003 is actually decreasing and the number of men is increasing.

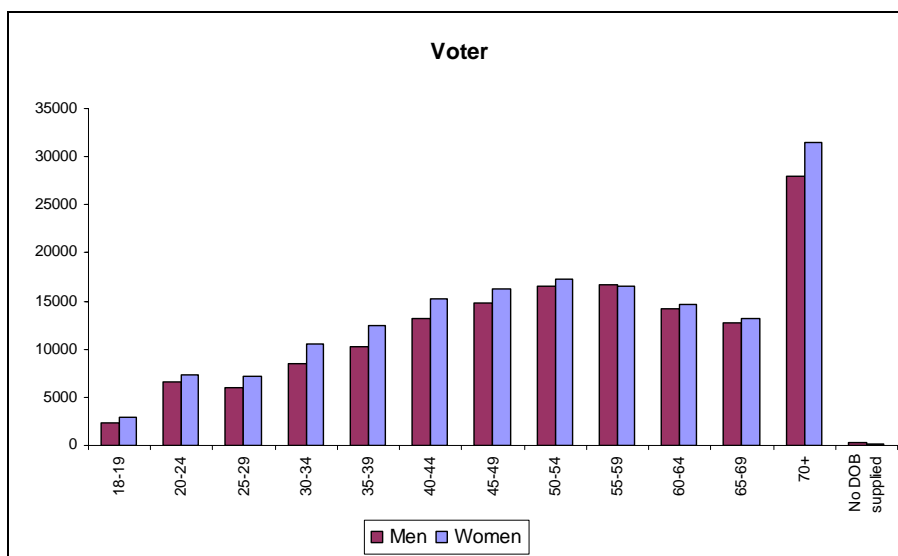


Chart 10: Voters by Age Group and Gender. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth or gender was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

A summary of the data is shown in Appendix 7.

Age and Location of Electors and Voters

Whilst the majority of electors are from metropolitan local governments, country and outer metropolitan make up the majority of the districts.

Metropolitan districts are identified with the post codes 6000 to 6199 and 6800 to 6999. Outer metropolitan districts are distinguished as being outside of this post code range but with ease of access from the city such as Mandurah and Serpentine-Jarrahdale.

In 2003, 55 local governments were in postal elections, with 23 from the metropolitan area and 32 from the country and outer-metropolitan areas.

Electors in the metropolitan area accounted for 82.2% of postal electors with the majority in age groups 35–44 and 45–54. Voters accounted for 78.7% with the majority in age groups 55–64 and 70+. This is illustrated in the chart below.

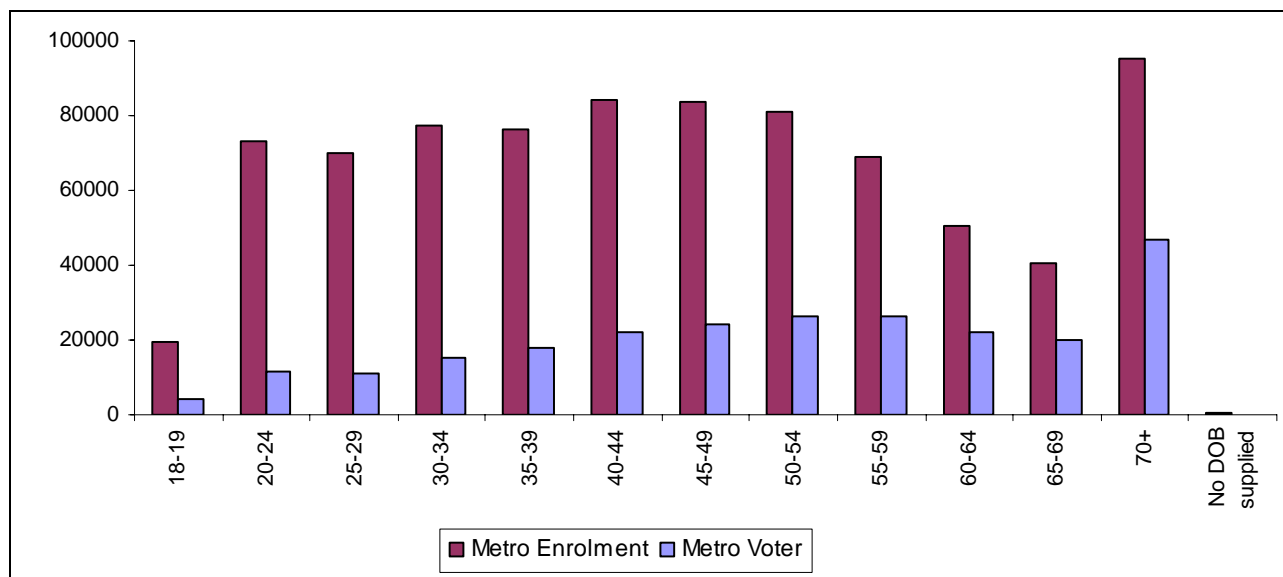


Chart 11: Enrolment and Voting in the Metropolitan Area. (Note: Includes voters whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

The 2003 elector and voter trend for metropolitan postal voting local governments is similar to the situation in 2001.

In 2001, 47 local governments were in postal elections, with 22 from the metropolitan area and 25 from the country and outer-metropolitan areas. Electors 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+.

Some country districts have metropolitan residents on their owners' and occupiers' rolls.

Their participation has been analysed in the individual reports sent to each local government.

Appendix 8 shows the actual number of electors and voters by age group and location.

In country local governments for 2003, electors accounted for 17.8% of postal electors with the majority in age groups 35–44 and 45–54. Voters accounted for 21.2% with the majority in age groups 45–54 and 65+. This is illustrated in the following chart.

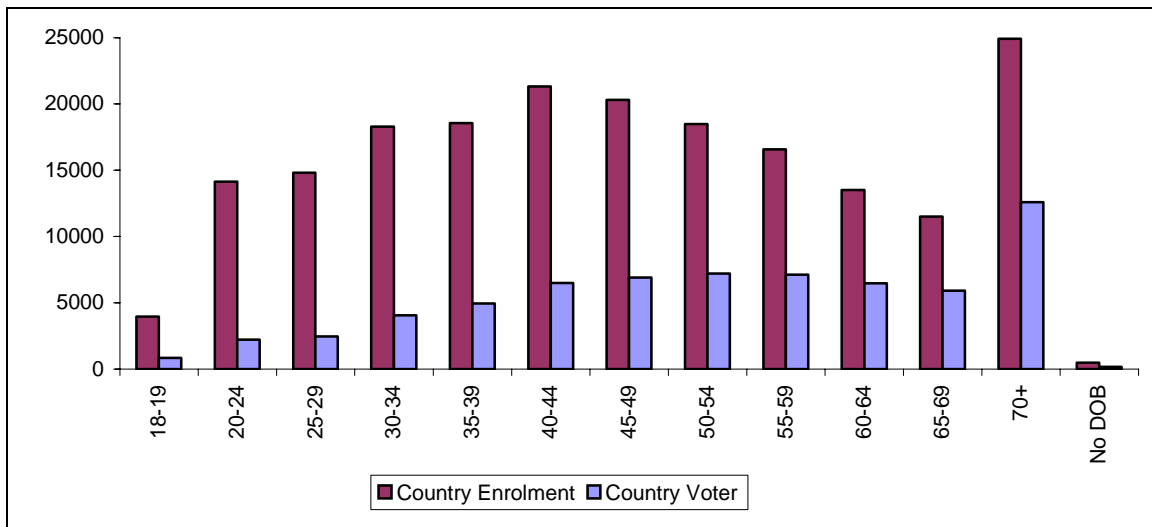


Chart 12: Enrolment and Voting in the Country. (Note: Includes voters whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

Again, the 2003 elector and voter trend for country postal voting local governments is not unlike the situation in 2001.

Electors accounted for 17.7% of postal electors in 2001 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+. In 2003, country electors accounted for 17.8% and 21.2% voted. In 2001, country electors accounted for 17.7% and 21.7% voted.

Country electors continue to vote in greater proportion to their enrolment than metropolitan electors. This is illustrated in the following chart.

In 2003, of the 82% of metropolitan electors, only 33% actually voted. However, in the county, with only 18% of electors, the number of voters was 42%.

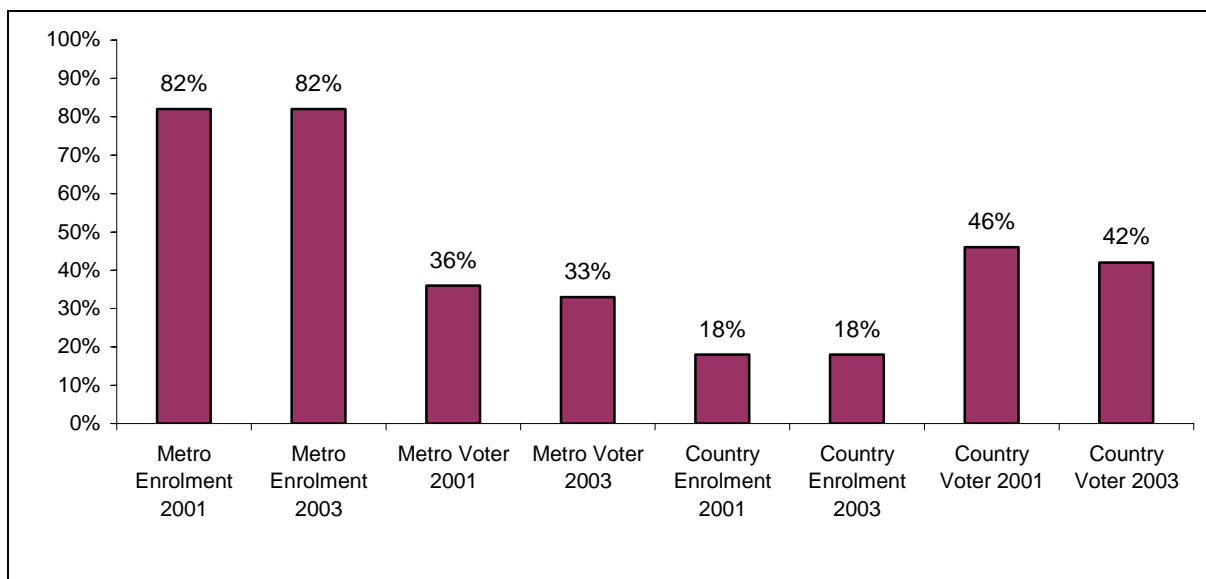


Chart 13: Metropolitan Enrolment and Voting Compared with Country Enrolment and Voting. Data Source: EMSWA

Electors and Voters by Enrolment Type

Residents and owners and occupiers are eligible to vote.

A resident is a person who is enrolled as an elector on the State electoral roll for a residence in the local government district by the date of roll close for the election.

Non-resident owners of rateable property, who live outside the local government district, must be enrolled on the State or Commonwealth roll and must have completed an *Enrolment Eligibility Claim* form and lodged it with the Chief Executive Officer

of the local government by the date of roll close for the election.

Non resident occupiers with a right of continuous occupation of rateable property under a lease, tenancy agreement or other legal instrument may also apply for enrolment. The right of continuous occupation must extend for a period of at least three months at the time the person claims enrolment.

A total of 907,948 electors were sent a postal voting election package in 2003. Of this number, 97.8% were resident electors and 2.2% owners and occupiers. This is illustrated in the chart below.

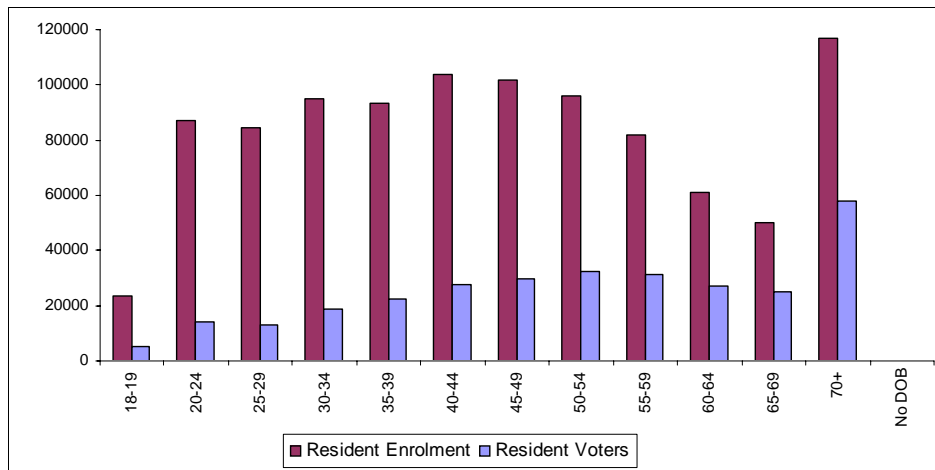


Chart 14: Residents' Enrolment and Voter Participation. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

Electors who voted included 96.6% residents and 3.4% owners and occupiers. This is illustrated in the chart below.

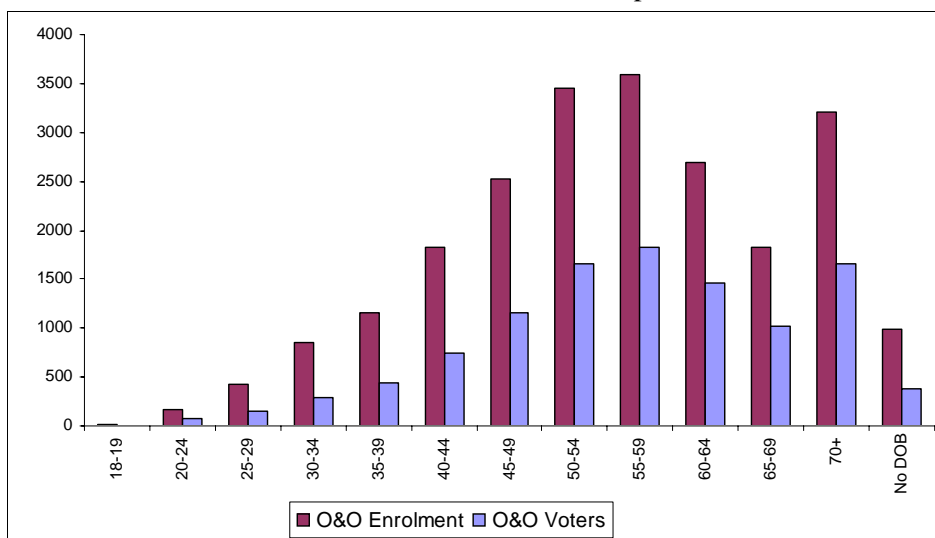


Chart 15: Owner and Occupier Enrolment and Voter Participation. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

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

Comparison of Participation in Postal and Voting in person elections

Fifty-five local governments participated in postal voting elections in 2003 serving 86% of eligible electors on the roll. Of the total number of electors who voted in the 2003 elections, postal voters accounted for 92%.

This compares to 47 local governments in 2001, serving 81% of electors on the roll and with postal voters accounting for 92% of all persons who voted at the elections.

The following table provides a comparison between postal and voting in person elections in 2003.

Postal	Postal	% of Total	In-person	% of Total
Districts participating	55	39.0%	86	61.0%
Total no. of wards with vacancies	190	42.8%	254	57.2%
No. of wards uncontested (no candidates)	0	0.0%	24	9.4%
No. of wards with candidates elected unopposed	48	25.3%	149	58.7%
Total no. of wards contested	142	74.7%	81	31.9%
Number of electors in contested elections	907,948	87.8%	125,786	12.2%
Number of voters	317,313	92.0%	27,727	8.0%

Table 10: Summary of Participation in 2003 Local Government Elections. Total does not include Referendum or Mayoral figures, except in wards where there was a Mayoral election only (i.e. no contest for council vacancies) to avoid double counting of electors or voters. Figures for voting in person elections do not include owners and occupiers if the vacancy was not contested. Data Source for Voting in person elections: Department of Local Government and Regional Development.

Postal Election Participation

Voter participation needs to be understood in the context of the number of electors and vacancies to be filled.

In 1997, the average participation rate was 47%. In 1999, the rate was 42%. In 2001, the rate was 38%. In 2003, the average rate was 35%.

Average participation however is not a true indicator of voter interest.

Large local governments, particularly in the metropolitan area, use postal voting and their sheer size affects the average. Larger local governments generally have lower voter participation. This has the effect of lowering the average rate.

To enable a fairer method of participation, comparisons must be made for local governments with similar elector bases.

In 2003:

- One local government had an elector base of less than 300 electors, comprising 222 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 222 electors

of which, 172 persons voted with an average participation rate of 77.48%.

- Three local governments had an elector base of between 301 and 999 electors, comprising 2,518 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 2,297 electors of which, 1,509 persons voted with an average participation rate of 65.69%.
- Six local governments had an elector base of between 1,000 and 2,499 electors, comprising 11,573 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 9,474 electors of which, 4,988 persons voted with an average participation rate of 52.65%.
- Nine local governments had an elector base of between 2,500 and 4,999 electors, comprising 32,304 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 27,156 electors of which, 12,512 persons voted with an average participation rate of 46.07%.
- Eleven local governments had an elector base of between 5,000 and 9,999 electors, comprising 78,600 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 62,634 electors of which, 26,414 persons voted with an average participation rate of 42.17%.
- Ten local governments had an elector base of between 10,000 and 19,999 electors, comprising 157,682 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 155,927 electors of which, 59,712

persons voted with an average participation rate of 38.29%.

- Three local governments had an elector base of between 20,000 and 29,999 electors, comprising 65,564 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 44,721 electors of which, 18,658 persons voted with an average participation rate of 41.72%.
- Three local governments had an elector base of between 30,000 and 39,999 electors, comprising 99,448 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 84,630 electors of which, 29,122 persons voted with an average participation rate of 34.41%.
- Four local governments had an elector base of between 40,000 and 49,999 electors, comprising 181,625 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 149,171 electors of which, 48,122 persons voted with an average participation rate of 32.26%.
- Two local governments had an elector base of between 50,000 and 59,999 electors, comprising 104,372 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 104,372 electors of which, 30,833 persons voted with an average participation rate of 29.54%.
- One local government had an elector base of between 60,000 and 69,999 electors, comprising 64,876 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 64,876 electors of which, 25,780

persons voted with an average participation rate of 39.74%.

- Two local governments had an elector base of 100,000 plus electors, comprising 219,160 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 202,468 electors of which, 59,491 persons voted with an average participation rate of 29.38%.

The foregoing information is illustrated in a summary table and a chart.

	Electors	Voters	No. of LG
0-300	222	172	1
301-999	2,297	1,509	3
1,000-2,499	9,474	4,988	6
2,500-4,999	27,156	12,512	9
5,000-9,999	62,634	26,414	11
10,000-19,999	155,927	59,712	10
20,000-29,999	44,721	18,658	3
30,000-39,999	84,630	29,122	3
40,000-49,999	149,171	48,122	4
50,000-59,999	104,372	30,833	2
60,000-69,999	64,876	25,780	1
100,000 plus	202,468	59,491	2
Total	907,948	317,313	55

Table 11: Summary of electors and voters by group of postal voting local governments. Data Source: EMSWA

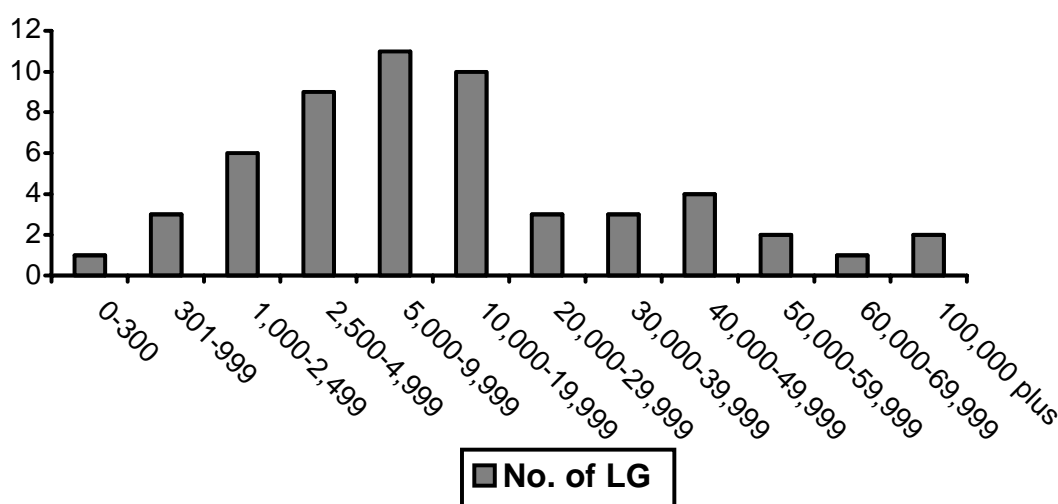


Chart 16: Number of local governments according to elector base. Data Source: EMSWA

Voting In Person Election Participation

Appendix 15 indicates the average participation rate for voting in person local governments in 2003.

What was known in 2001 and is again evident in 2003 is that electors participate readily in voting in person elections in districts with a small population.

In 2003, 86 local governments, comprising 125,786 electors and 27,727 voters, used the in-person method and achieved an average participation of 22.04%. The turnout varies considerably, again, according to the elector base.

In 2003:

- Thirteen local governments had an elector base of less than 300 electors, comprising 2,680 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 487 electors of which 336 persons voted, with an average participation rate of 69%.
- Forty-one local governments had an elector base of between 301 and 999 electors, comprising 26,484 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 12,313 electors of which 5,678 persons voted, with an average participation rate of 46.11%.
- Eighteen local governments had an elector base of between 1,000 and 2,499 electors, comprising 28,300 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 14,461 electors of which 5,225 persons voted, with an average participation rate of 36.13%.
- Six local governments had an elector base of between 2,500 to 4,999 electors, comprising 20,168 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 17,324 electors of which 4,336 persons voted with an average participation rate of 25.03%.

- Six local governments had an elector base of 5,000 to 9,999 electors, comprising 41,128 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 33,548 electors of which 6,112 persons voted with an average participation rate of 18.22%.
- One local government had an elector base of 10,000 to 19,999 electors, comprising 11,971 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 9,108 electors of which 2,157 persons voted with an average participation rate of 23.68%.
- One local government had an elector base of 30,000 to 39,999 electors, comprising 38,545 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 38,545 electors of which, 3,883 persons voted with an average participation rate of 10.07%.

The foregoing information is illustrated in a summary table and a chart for illustration purposes.

	Electors	Voters	No. of LG
0-300	487	336	13
301-999	12,313	5,678	41
1,000-2,499	14,461	5,225	18
2,500-4,999	17,324	4,336	6
5,000-9,999	33,548	6,112	6
10,000-19,999	9,108	2,157	1
30,000-39,999	38,545	3,883	1
Total	125,786	27,727	86

Table 12: Summary of electors and voters by group of voting in person local governments. Data Source: EMSWA

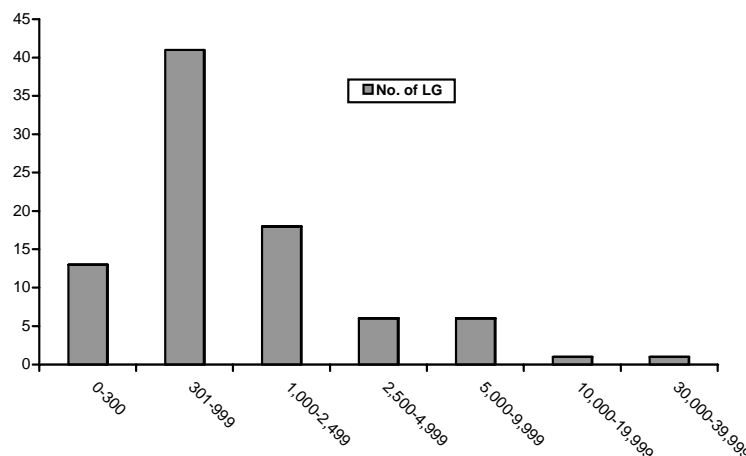


Chart 17: Number of voting in person local governments according to elector base. Data Source: EMSWA

Participation Comparison of Elector Bases across all Local Governments

Whilst it is true that participation is higher for local governments with smaller elector bases, it is useful to compare postal and voting in person elector bases.

Postal voting continues to realize a higher participation rate.

The foregoing information is illustrated in a summary table and a chart for illustration purposes.

	Postal	Voting In Person	No. of LG
Participation %			
0-300	77.48	68.99	14
301-999	65.69	46.11	44
1,000-2,499	52.65	36.13	24
2,500-4,999	46.07	25.03	15
5,000-9,999	42.17	18.22	17
10,000-19,999	38.29	23.68	11
20,000-29,999	41.72		3
30,000-39,999	34.41	10.07	4
40,000-49,999	32.26		4
50,000-59,999	29.54		2
60,000-69,999	39.74		1
100,000 plus	29.38		2
Total			141

Table 13: Summary of electors and voters by group of voting in person local governments. Data Source: EMSWA

The following table provides a comparison between postal and voting in person elections in neighbouring districts in 2003.

Postal	%	Voting in person	%
Bassendean	34.7		
Belmont	35.6	Bayswater	10.1
Stirling	31.8		
Vincent	37.1		
Fremantle	44.3	East Fremantle	19.0
Cottesloe	44.2	Mosman Park	8.6
Melville	39.7		
Claremont	46.0		
Nedlands	39.4		
Collie	38.8	Harvey	23.7
Bunbury	37.2		

Table 14: A comparison of Participation between Postal and Voting in person elections in neighbouring districts. Data Source: EMSWA

The above figures suggest that local governments who continue to use the voting in person method of voting may not be representative of the whole community. Whilst voting in local government elections is not compulsory, the community may

have an interest but not feel compelled to attend a polling place for the purpose of casting their vote.

Local governments should then look at ways in which to encourage the community to participate and one way is to use the postal method.

In certain country areas where the population is small and there is a strong sense of community the participation for voting in person elections can be as high as 80% as was the case with the Shires of Kondinin and Murchison.

Large metropolitan electorates generally obtain relatively low participation rates. For example, the City of Joondalup with an elector base of 100,532 had a lower participation rate in 2003 as compared to 2001, despite mayoral elections being conducted at the same time. The same could be said of the City of Stirling.

The data indicates generally that the larger the elector base, the lower the participation rate, which is consistent with the result for postal elections in 1999 and 2001. Whilst postal voting leads to better participation, it is evident that in small populations where there is a high level of community interest, voting in person also achieves a reasonable turnout.

Voter interest over three ordinary postal elections

It is now evident that voter interest in the metropolitan area continues to decline unless there are elections that hold a special interest for the community such as the election of mayor and referendums.

Conversely, voter interest in country areas have continued to increase and this is a reflection of the level of community involvement in local government.

The smaller the number of electors, the greater the level of voter interest. Conversely, the larger the number of electors, the smaller the level of voter interest. This is reflected in the following chart.

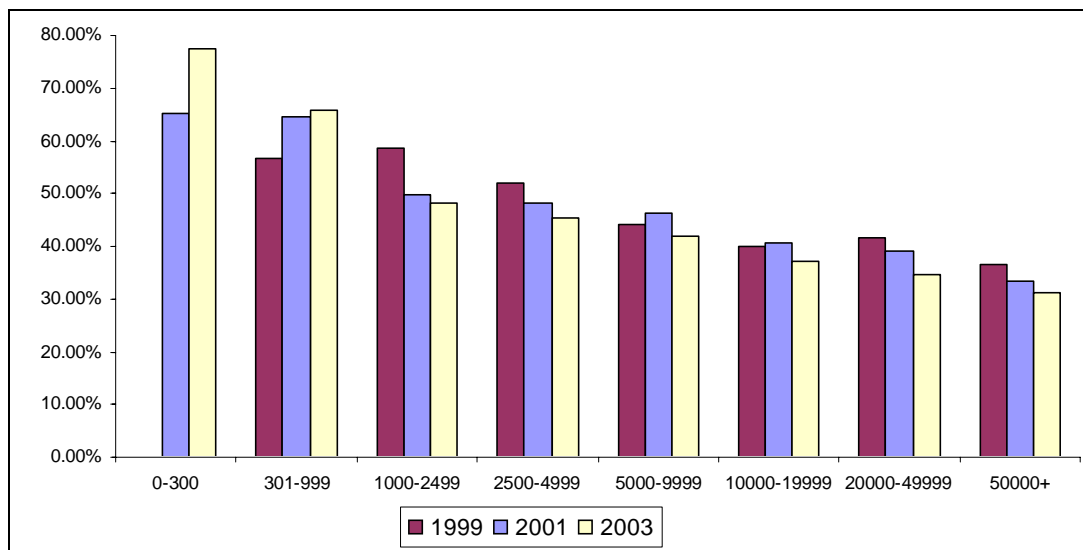


Chart 18: Postal election participation over three ordinary elections by size of elector base. Data Source: EMSWA

LATE MAIL

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

In 2003, 5,916 electors (0.65% of the packages dispatched) returned their packages too late to be included in the poll. This compares with 2001,

when 7,353 electors (0.88%) were unable to participate in the poll.

Details for each local government are at Appendix 12.

Despite information regarding the election being included in the election package, some electors are not aware of the time it can take to return postal voting packages. Some voters may be under the impression that voting is compulsory for local government elections and elect to return the packages even though the poll has closed.

Voters have the option of returning election packages on the day of the election and a number continue to take up that option.

UNCLAIMED MAIL

If an elector was no longer at the address shown on the roll, the Commission attempted to direct the election package to another address if this had changed since the date of roll close.

21,430 election packages were returned as unclaimed mail in 2003, representing 2.36% of packages dispatched. This compares with 16,804 in 2001 or 2.02% of packages dispatched.

Following the election, the Commission collated unclaimed packages by local government 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.

Mail not claimed by residents on the roll were forwarded to the Australian Electoral Commission to verify an ongoing entitlement to be enrolled. If this entitlement no longer existed, the process to have their names removed from the roll will commence.

Details for each local government are at Appendix 13.

COSTS

Costs for the elections are allocated on the basis of direct (directly attributed to individual local governments) and shared (costs associated with the postal vote checking 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.

Smaller local governments are more affected by direct costs, such as fees paid to returning officers, advertising, postage, printing and electoral staff costs. If the costs are apportioned per elector, they appear to be very high.

Conversely, larger local governments tend to benefit from the sharing of indirect costs if they are apportioned over a large elector base. Whilst these local governments are still affected by direct costs, their cost per elector seems relatively low when compared to the smaller local governments.

The Commission is mindful of the cost of conducting elections and maximises cost savings in every process. The benefits then flow on to each local government.

The Commission is required to conduct these elections on a full accrual cost recovery basis under the *Local Government Act 1995*. Whilst estimates are provided to most local governments prior to the election, the actual cost incurred must be passed on. The estimates include approximations of the number of candidates, electors, advertising, mailing, staffing and so on, and excludes costs for additional advertising that might be required by individual local governments.

The costs for the election are invoiced in two instalments, the first prior to the end of the 2003/2004 financial year and the balance payable when full costs are known.

CANDIDATE SURVEY

Following the election, 101 candidates (approximately 16% of all candidates) were selected at random from the EMSWA database for the purpose of a survey to assess the adequacy of the provision of information, service and legislative compliance.

57 surveys were returned.

Candidates were asked the following questions and asked to respond along a scale of:

- strongly agree
- agree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- not applicable.

	SA	A	D	SD	NA
The returning officer was accessible for enquiries	64.9%	29.8%	3.5%	1.8%	0%
The material included in the nomination pack was sufficient for my requirements	35.1%	59.6%	1.8%	3.5%	0%
The manual <i>A Guide for Candidates</i> was useful	32.1%	64.3%	0%	1.8%	1.8%
The manual <i>A Guide for Scrutineers</i> was useful	26.8%	55.4%	0%	3.6%	14.3%
I received accurate information quickly and to my satisfaction from the returning officer	61.4%	33.3%	1.8%	3.5%	0%
I used the Electoral Commission's website for information on the nomination process	0%	41.2%	58.8%	0%	0%
I understood the requirements of regulation 24(b) of the <i>Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997</i> in relation to the preparation of my profile	43.6%	54.5%	1.8%	0%	0%
I was satisfied with the way the returning officer took my nomination	71.9%	24.6%	1.8%	1.8%	0%
If you also attended the briefing session for candidates and Scrutineers after the close of nominations, was it useful?	54.5%	36.4%	4.5%	4.5%	56%
On a future occasion I would consider using the Electoral Commission's website to complete and forward my nomination to the returning officer	21.2%	28.8%	15.4%	17.3%	17.3%
The procedure for the delivery of the postal voting election packages to electors was well explained by the returning officer	43.6%	40%	1.8%	5.5%	9.1%
The CD-ROM roll provided for the election following nomination was sufficient for my purposes	18.9%	41.5%	11.3%	15.1%	13.2%
I was advised of all corrections made to the rolls	25.5%	33.3%	17.6%	13.7%	9.8%
The information provided by the Commission regarding the number of packages returned from electors was useful	37.7%	41.5%	1.9%	1.9%	17%
I was satisfied with the way the returning officer conducted the election	67.3%	27.3%	1.8%	3.6%	0%
The returning officer demonstrated knowledge of the <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> and the <i>Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997</i>	42.9%	42.9%	7.1%	3.6%	3.6%
As a candidate, I am of the view that some amendments should be made to the <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> and the <i>Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997</i>	36.2%	12.8%	12.8%	6.4%	31.9%

The survey revealed:

- Many candidates have the facility to access the Commission's website, the development of which is subject to continuous improvement. The most frequent use was to view the number of packages returned daily. Very few candidates used the website for the nominations process but would consider doing so given that this type of electronic lodgement was available.
- A very small number of candidates did not receive information quickly. This is a matter of training for returning officers and will be given particular attention in the 2005 elections.
- Some candidates felt that it was unnecessary to attend a briefing session after the close of

nominations. The usefulness of this type of information session will be re-examined for the 2005 election.

- The dispatch date for postal voting election packages caused some dissatisfaction for some candidates who placed a reliance on this to ensure their mailing was timed to coincide. This is not a matter that the Commission is able to control owing to the Easter break.
- The CD-ROM roll data was not useful to some candidates who wished to use it for mailing to voters. In 2005, more instructions will be provided to candidates on how to access and manipulate the files for mailing purposes.
- Corrections to the roll caused some problems for candidates who preferred to be advised

immediately or on a regular basis by the returning officer.

- Some candidates requested amendments to the legislation. This is dealt with in the section titled “Future Directions”.
- A considerable number of candidates made suggestions about improving the efficiency of the postal voting election process, matters that the Commission will consider further.
- The majority of candidates were praiseworthy of the level of performance by the returning officer. This result supports the Commission’s initiative in upgrading its training procedures significantly.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

For its report on the 2001 local government postal elections, the Commission placed on record some thoughts about possible legislative and procedural changes that would assist the election process.

Little progress has occurred on these and the following issues remain of concern:

- The legislation should allow for an enduring decision to opt for postal voting, and to make the Electoral Commissioner responsible for elections, rather than requiring local governments by special majority to come to this decision on each occasion.
- Local government boundary changes continue to occur in close proximity to the close of rolls and should be scheduled earlier so as to allow for more careful application of new boundaries to existing rolls. An approach has been made to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development and the Department of Land Information which could see procedural changes occurring to remedy this problem prior to the May 2005 elections.
- The election timeline allows little time for the production and dispatch of election packages, especially when Easter intervenes as it did for the May 2003 elections. As an illustration of the scale of the practical task of preparing packages for these elections, some 4.8 million separate items had to be prepared, proofed, printed and then assembled into 907,948 voting packages and dispatched to electors within 7-10 days of the close of nominations. For postal elections in particular, it is critical that sufficient time is available after the close

of nominations to undertake this task and ideally the election timeline should be extended to accommodate this.

- In postal elections, the vast majority of electors have voted and returned their packages prior to election day. There are compelling practical reasons for the close of polling in a postal election to occur during the business week (say at 11 am on a Thursday), with counting occurring shortly thereafter, obviating the need for polling places to be open on a Saturday, when in fact, only a small number will vote.
- Amendments should clarify a returning officer’s capacity to reject a vote on the basis of signature, so as to guard against electoral fraud.
- Competing concerns about the privacy of electoral roll information and the requirements for local government information to be available for sale need to be reconciled, so that roll information is provided only on a principled basis, while attending to reasonable concerns about the need for electoral rolls to be transparent public documents.
- In 2005, the Commission is likely to be required to conduct a State general election possibly in February or March 2005 with local government biennial elections scheduled only a few weeks later on 7 May 2005. Two significant electoral events within a short space of time will present challenges to the Commission and some consideration is currently being given to how best to structure and manage the Commission’s available resources in order to be well prepared for this task. The Commission is likely to ask local governments to make early commitments concerning postal elections so that the scale of the task is known by late 2004 and sensible cost efficient preparations can be made.