

Foreword

In May 2005, as Acting Electoral Commissioner, I was responsible for the conduct of 50 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, local government adopted a method of conducting elections that is more convenient for electors and typically achieves a higher rate of voter participation.

Postal elections for local government were first trialled by four local governments in 1995. This increased to eight in 1997, 34 in 1999, 47 in 2001 and 55 in 2003.

On 7 May 2005, the 50 local governments using the postal voting method comprised 1,006,627 electors. Of these, 823,982 in 181 wards proceeded to an election in the May 2005 local government elections. A total of 94% of all electors in Western Australia had the opportunity to vote in a postal election. In a short space of time, postal elections have become the preferred way that electors now choose to participate in local decision-making.

The conduct of these elections remains 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. Various new initiatives have allowed for significant savings to be made in the cost of undertaking these elections.

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

I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of returning officers for their energy and application towards the successful conduct of this significant event.

Warwick Gately AM
ACTING ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER

30 July 2005

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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 local governments asked the Electoral Commissioner to conduct their ordinary elections using the postal voting method in May 2005. One local government requested that the voting in person method be used.

At the close of nominations on 31 March 2005, 47 of the 50 local governments proceeded to election using the postal voting method. Vacancies for three local governments using the postal voting method and one using the voting in person method were unopposed and were declared elected by the returning officer.

The election of a mayor was conducted for nine of the postal voting local governments and a referendum was conducted for the Cities of Cockburn and Albany. One local government conducted its ordinary election as a voting in person election with the Western Australian Electoral Commission 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 the following three statutory advertisements in a newspaper with statewide circulation:

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

The Commission placed all statutory advertisements in *The Western Australian*.

In addition to statutory advertising, the Commission, in partnership with the Department of Local Government and Regional Development (DLGRD), placed promotional advertisements in local and community newspapers with the focus on increasing nominations and voter turnout. Press releases were issued to a range of media outlets.

Returning officers were provided with manuals and guidelines for the conduct of the election. Candidates were provided with a *Candidate Pack* on CD, that included publications prepared by the Commission and DLGRD. 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, on request, 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 50 postal elections that the Commission agreed to conduct, a total of 562 candidates nominated for 291 vacancies in 181 wards. Four candidates nominated for four vacancies in one district for the one voting in person election conducted by the Commission.

Of the 47 postal elections that did go to a ballot, a total of 491 candidates contested 219 vacancies. There were 461 candidates for councillor and 30 candidates for mayoral positions. There were 210 contested vacancies for councillor and nine for mayor.

A total of 823,982 election packages comprising a ballot paper(s), a ballot paper envelope, a reply paid envelope, an information sheet and profiles of the candidates were sent to electors in 47 postal elections.

Staff from local governments issued replacement and provisional packages. A total of 2,257 replacement packages were issued for the 47 postal elections.

Provisional packages were issued only if electors were omitted from the residents or owners and occupiers rolls. A total of 96 provisional packages were issued.

A total of 307,700 (37.34%) packages were returned by voters.

A postal vote checking centre was established in the Tom Wilding Pavilion at the Claremont Showgrounds. 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 ensured 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 election day (7 May 2005) 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 web site 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 2005 was 37.34%. This compared with 34.95% in May 2003. 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 numbers of electors.

Of the total number of voters who voted, postal voters accounted for 93.6%. Thus, only 6.4% of local government voters actually voted at voting in person elections in 2005.

A total of 2,733 packages were received after the close of the poll for the 47 postal voting elections, an average of 0.33%. Whilst the percentage was not significant, it indicated that some electors did not take into consideration the time constraints regarding the return of postal voting packages.

A total of 12,704 packages were returned to the Commission as unclaimed mail, an average of 1.54% of all packages dispatched. These addresses were referred to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) or the local government (for owners and occupiers) so that appropriate action could be taken to correct the roll.

Legislation requires that the cost of the Electoral Commissioner's conduct of local government elections 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 Commission staff available to run the elections.

Within the constraints of government policy, the Electoral Commissioner seeks to deliver the elections in a price competitive way. In 2005, 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; and
- increased use of technology.

Whilst there is often a focus on the price of the elections, it is important to recognise 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 impacts cost. The smallest election conducted by the Commission was the Shire of Mount Marshall election involving 62 electors. The largest was the City of Stirling election involving 122,790 electors.

A number of costs associated with the elections, such as the cost of statutory advertising, are fixed regardless of the number of electors. This results in smaller elections being comparatively more

expensive to conduct than those for larger local governments.

Election costs decreased in most areas for the May 2005 elections as a result of cost saving initiatives. Significant savings were made at the centralising processing centre and in the cost to print and collate the election packages.

Comparative Statistics 2003 and 2005 Local Government Postal Elections

Ordinary Elections	May 2003 Postal	May 2005 Postal
Local Government Districts	55	50
Enrolled electors	1,017,944	1,006,627
Referendums/Polls	1	2
Mayoral Elections		
Vacancies	10	9
Elected unopposed	0	0
Contested	10	9
Candidates	39	30
President Elections		
Vacancies	1	
Elected unopposed	0	
Contested	1	
Candidates	2	
Wards		
Vacancies	190	181
Contested	142	128
Councillor Elections		
Vacancies	317	291
Elected unopposed	59	71
Contested	258	219
Candidates	532	491
Positions unfilled	0	1
Election Packages		
Dispatched	907,948	823,982
Returned at close of poll	317,313	307,700
Turnout		
Range	27% to 77%	30% to 77%
Average	34.95%	37.43%
Cost		
*Total cost	\$3,104,103	\$2,096,408

*Excludes GST.

Table 1: Comparative Statistics 2003 and 2005 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. Any council may conduct its own voting in person election or request the Electoral Commissioner to conduct a voting in person election on its behalf.

The Act also provides for the conduct of polls or referenda 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, 55 in 2003 and 50 in 2005.

In 2005, approximately 84.82% of electors had access to the postal voting method with the majority in the metropolitan area. This compared with 85.81% in 2003.

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 2005.

Local governments which participated in postal elections in 2005 are listed at Appendix 14. The Shires of Exmouth, Merredin and Plantagenet did not proceed to an election in 2005 as an equal number of nominations were received for the vacancies.

All 50 local governments had previously used the postal voting method.

The Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku made the Electoral Commissioner responsible for its voting in person election in May 2005. This was the second 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 2005

In planning for 2005, a driving factor was to provide an improved service to local governments, at least cost. As a consequence, the following initiatives were put into place for the 2005 elections.

Centralised Processing

Checking postal voting packages at a central location was more cost effective than the individual multiskilling of staff. Also, access to facilities and resources at the one location provided considerable cost savings to smaller local governments which would otherwise have had 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 allowed remote processing by returning officers at local government offices or where access to the Internet was available. The system utilises Microsoft.Net platform under the Object-Oriented-Software-Process (OOSP). Returning officers were able to log on to a central server under strict access protocols and were able to perform all the functions that previously could only be conducted centrally. Communication between the returning officers and the central server was facilitated using Microsoft's latest version of the software remoting over a secure version of the Internet.

Internet Reporting Systems

The number of packages returned by voters was published daily from 18 April 2005 on the Commission's web site 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 election day which is the first Saturday in May every two years. These dates are fixed, which greatly assists with 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; and
- election day, the count and declaration of results.

ELECTION TIMETABLE Local Government Ordinary Election 7 May 2005

Days to Polling Day	Local Government Act	References to Act/Regs	Day	Date
80	Last day for agreement of Electoral Commissioner to conduct postal election.	LGA 4.20 (2)(3)(4)	Wed	16/02/2005
80	A decision made to conduct the election as a postal election cannot be rescinded after the 80th day.	LGA 4.61(5)	Wed	16/02/2005
80	Electoral Commissioner to appoint a person to be the Returning Officer of the Local Government for the election.	LGA 4.20 (4)	Sat	26/02/2005
70 to 56	Between the 70th/56th day the CEO is to give Statewide public notice of the time and date of close of enrolments. Preferred date Wednesday 2 March 2005	LGA 4.39(2)	Sat to Sat	26/02/2005 to 12/03/2005
56	Advertising may begin for nominations from 56 days and no later than 45 days before election day. Preferred date Wednesday 16 March 2005	LGA 4.47(1)	Sat	12/03/2005
50	Close roll 5.00 pm	LGA 4.39(1)	Fri	18/03/2005
45	Last day for advertisement to be placed calling for nominations.	LGA 4.47(1)	Wed	23/03/2005
44	Nominations Open First day for candidates to lodge completed nomination paper, in the prescribed form, with the Returning Officer. Nominations period is open for 8 days.	LGA 4.49(a)	Thu	24/03/2005
43	Good Friday		Fri	25/03/2005
40	Easter Monday		Mon	28/03/2005
38	If a candidate's nomination is withdrawn not later than 4.00 pm on the 38th day before election day, the candidate's deposit is to be refunded.	Reg. 27(5)	Wed	30/03/2005
37	Close of Nominations 4.00 pm on the 37th day before election day.	LGA 4.49(a)	Thu	31/03/2005
36	CEO to prepare an owners & occupiers roll for the election. Electoral Commissioner to prepare residents roll.	LGA 4.41(1) LGA 4.40(2)	Fri	1/04/2005
24	Lodgement of election packages with Australia Post.	Approx	Wed	13/04/2005
22	The preparation of any consolidated roll under subregulation (1) be completed on or before 22nd day before election day.	Reg. 18(2)	Fri	15/04/2005
19	Last day for the Returning Officer to give Statewide public notice of the election. Preferred date Wednesday 6 April 2005	LGA 4.64(1)	Mon	18/04/2005
19	Commence processing returned election packages	Approx	Mon	18/04/2005
12	Anzac Day		Mon	25/04/2005
0	Election Day Close of poll 6.00 pm	LGA 4.7	Sat	7/05/2005

Post Election Day	Post Declaration	References to Act/Regs	Day	Date
2	Election result advertisement.	LGA 4.77	Mon	9/05/2005
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	Sat	21/05/2005
28	An invalidity complaint is to be made to a Court of Disputed Returns, constituted by a magistrate, but can only be made within 28 days after notice is given of the result of the election.	LGA 4.81(1)	Sat	4/06/2005

RETURNING OFFICERS AND STAFF

Returning Officers

Recruitment of returning officers commenced in 2004, with the aim of appointing people who lived locally and were known to their communities. The Commission was interested in people who were highly organized with strong interpersonal, communication and computing skills.

Several people 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 staff from the Commission who had received the qualification of *Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment and Training*.

Returning officers attended training sessions in March 2005, timed to coincide closely with significant election events such as nominations.

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



Figure 1: Returning officer training

Administrative Staff

Election processes are labour intensive. A large number of casual staff was employed at the postal vote checking centre in Claremont and others were employed in various areas with specific responsibilities up to and including election day.

On election day, a small number of 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 most 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 *The West Australian*.

The first advertisement was a *Notice of Close of Enrolments*, which appeared in *The West Australian* on Wednesday 2 March 2005 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 16 March 2005 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 Wednesday 6 April 2005 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 9 May 2005.

Supplementary Statutory Advertising

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

Creative Advertising

The Commission's creative advertising campaign was carried out in partnership with the Department of Local Government and Regional Development with the dual aim of increasing voter turnout and increasing candidate nominations. The print campaign which targeted those objectives appeared frequently over the election period in community newspapers.

The image below combined with the tagline 'It's your council. Be counted.' was used extensively.



Be involved in the decision process.
Vote in your local government election.



Figure 2: Creative advertising pictorial

A number of local governments also took the opportunity to place promotional advertisements in local papers.

Media

To promote postal voting in the local government elections and support the advertising campaign, the Commission produced media releases targeting community and local newspapers as well as *The West Australian*. The releases focused on initiatives to make postal voting easier and encouraged electors to take part in the decision process at a local level. The releases were syndicated in each of the districts undertaking postal voting for greater local impact. The initial media release was followed by two reminder releases in the fortnight before the elections. A number of media interviews were also conducted on national and regional radio stations.

The Commission's Web Site

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; and
- 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 web site. This compared with average visits of around 7,384 per month.

Month	Key Event	Visits
March	Nominations	22,329
April	Return of election packages	22,229
May	Election day	22,320

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.

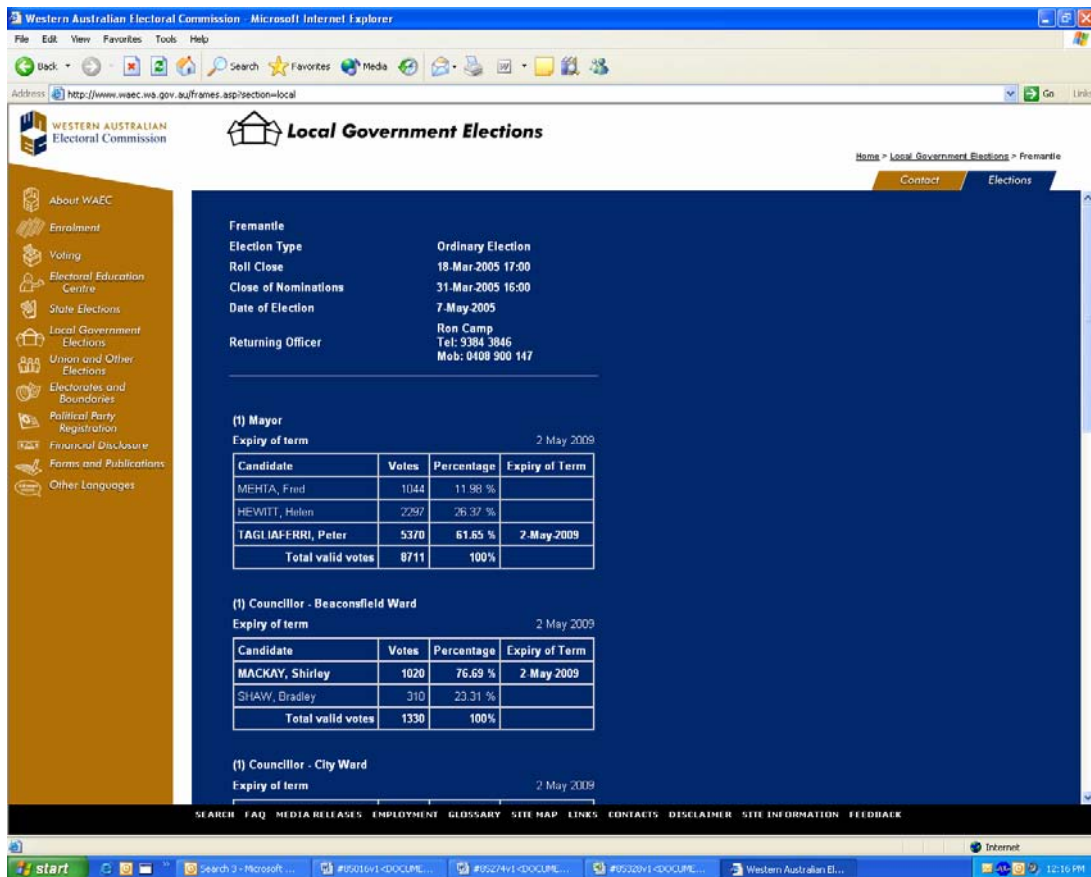


Figure 3: Local government postal election results on the Western Australian Electoral Commission web site.

ELECTORAL ROLLS

Close of the Roll

Prior to the close of the roll on 18 March 2005, a number of local government boundary changes were implemented that included:

- abolition of wards 2
- change of ward boundaries 10
- change of district boundaries 6

Although not as significant as in 2003, problems were still encountered by the Commission with the late gazettal of these changes in January and February 2005. Initiatives will be explored with the DLGRD and the Department of Land Information (DLI) to improve on this process for subsequent elections.

When the rolls closed, there were 1,267,693 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, on request, were provided with one free copy of the residents roll and the owners and occupiers roll.

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 personal information which could affect individuals' lives in critical ways;
- ensure individuals' information is accurate; and
- 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

Each candidate was provided with a candidate pack. The pack was a CD that contained the following:

- a publication entitled *A Guide for Candidates*;
- a publication entitled *A Guide for Scrutineers*;
- a publication entitled *A Candidate's Guide to Standing for Local Government*;
- a publication entitled *Local Government Elections 2005 – Frequently asked questions about local government elections*;
- Form LG 08 *Nomination for Election by Candidate*;
- Form LG 09 *Nomination for Election by Agent*;
- Form LG 09A *Disclosure of Gifts*;
- Form LG 18 *Appointment of Scrutineer*; and
- Form LG 35A *Local Government Postal Elections Information for Candidates*.

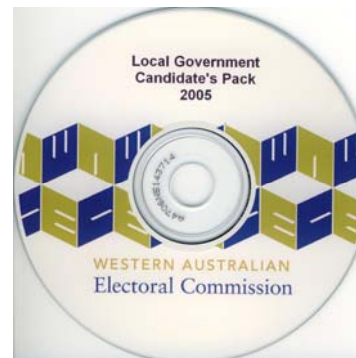


Figure 4: Candidate pack CD

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 24 March 2005 and closed at 4.00 pm on 31 March 2005.

Candidates

A total of 562 candidates nominated for 291 vacancies in 181 wards in 50 postal elections. At the close of nominations on 31 March 2005, there were 219 contested vacancies, 71 unopposed vacancies and one uncontested vacancy. A total of 491 candidates contested the 219 vacancies. There were 461 candidates for councillor and 30 candidates for mayoral positions. There were 210 contested vacancies for councillor and nine for mayor.

The Nominations Process

Nominations opened on 24 March 2005 and were received by returning officers. A complete nomination includes:

- completed nomination form;
- candidate profile;
- \$80 nomination deposit (cash or bank cheque); and
- 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 31 March 2005. 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 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. This was followed by a draw for position on the ballot paper.

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 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. Spelling mistakes and grammar were not corrected, as this was the responsibility of candidates.

There were 562 profiles received in 2005. The trend was that candidates were prepared to defer nominating to the last day. In 2005, 289 nominations were received on the last day which compares with 218 nominations in 2003.

The trend in deferring lodgement of nominations to the last day had some implications for the Commission in planning for the close of nominations, particularly if the number of local governments using the postal voting method remains high.

Gender of Candidates

In 2005, 404 males and 158 females nominated for vacancies in postal voting local governments. Of that number, 200 males and 90 females were elected to vacancies. A comparison with 2003 is shown below for postal elections:

Women comprised 28.11% of candidates. This was marginally more when compared to 2003 (25.32%). The proportion of women who were elected is 2.92% more than the proportion standing for election. For the one voting in person local government, three men and one woman were elected.

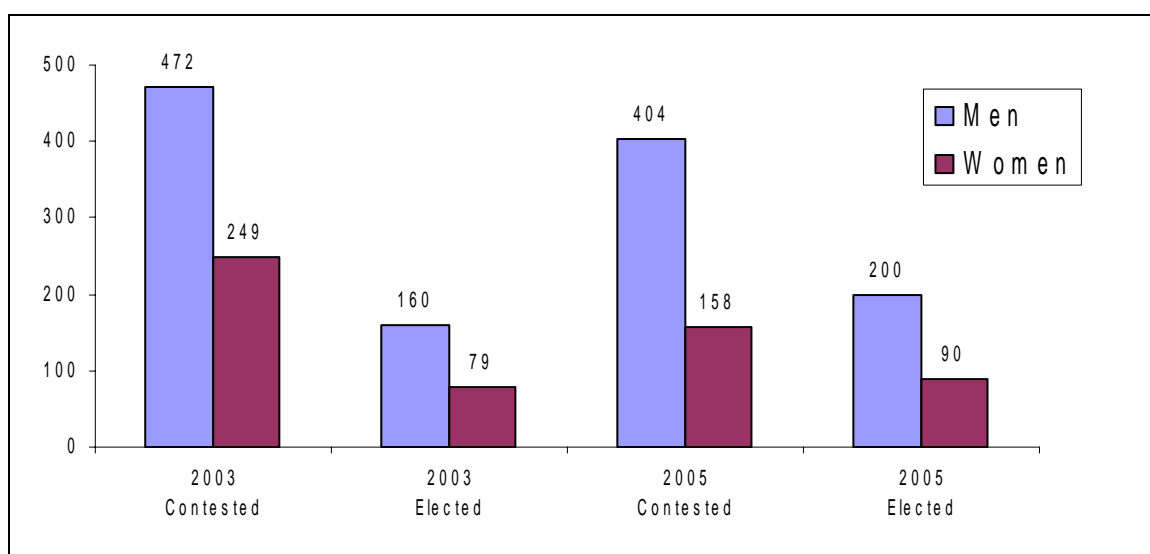


Chart 1: Candidates by Gender for Postal Voting Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

Age of Candidates

In 2005, the average age of candidates was 52 with an age range from 19 to 83.

In 2003, the average age was 52 with an age range between 18 and 81. For the one voting in person local government, the average age was 54 with an age range from 48 to 57.

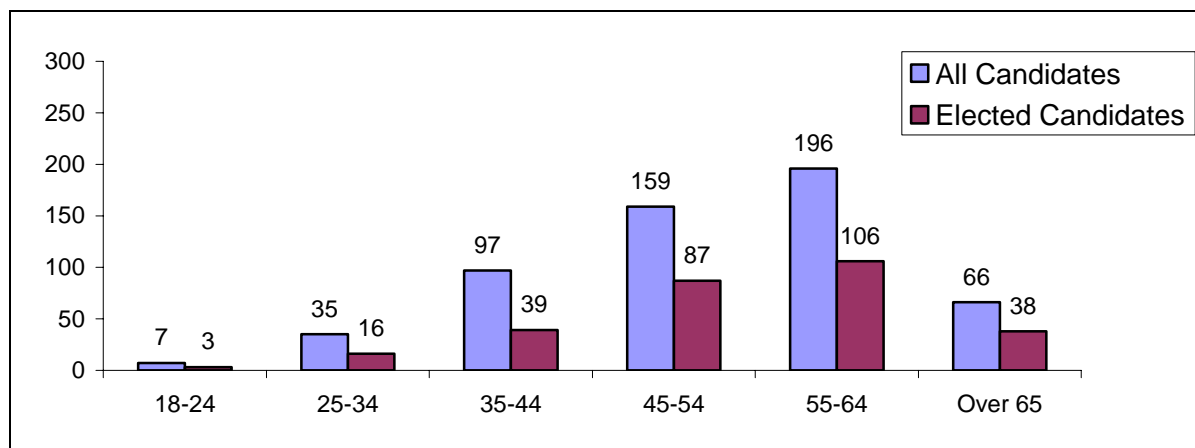


Chart 2: Candidates by Age Group for Postal Voting Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

Unopposed and Uncontested Wards

At the close of nominations on 31 March 2005, 53 of the 181 wards with vacancies for postal elections received an equal number of candidates and these candidates were declared elected unopposed.

From a total of 291 vacancies, 71 candidates were elected unopposed for postal elections.

One vacancy was uncontested.

All vacancies were elected unopposed for the one voting in person election.

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.

In 2005 the Commission established a call centre and engaged two liaison officers to provide information to the public as well as manage complaints received. The returning officers for each local government dealt with local issues where possible.

The number of formal complaints received was 20% down on the number received in 2003. Approximately 80 complaints were received during the May 2005 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; and
- election procedure.

All 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 advised accordingly. 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 complaints were referred to the Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC), as required by the *Corruption and Crime Commission Act 2003*. One was resolved and the other remains under investigation. A further two complaints are being examined by the Electoral Commission. The Office of the State Solicitor provided advice on other matters where minor or technical breaches of the Act may have occurred.

Invalidity Complaint

A person who is dissatisfied with the result of an election or with the way in which an election was conducted may make an invalidity complaint. An invalidity complaint is made to a Court of Disputed Returns and is required to be made within 28 days after notice is given of the result of the election. An invalidity complaint is a complaint that an election is invalid, or that another person should be declared elected, or that the term of office of a councillor should be longer or shorter than the term determined by the returning officer.

Two invalidity complaints were made in relation to the postal elections conducted.

The first was in the Shire of Greenough, where the incorrect candidate was declared elected due to a mathematical error in the final tallying of votes. The court overturned the results and declared the correct candidate elected.

The second invalidity complaint was in the Shire of Busselton, whereby one candidate was found not to be an elector of the district and therefore should have not been allowed to nominate. This was brought to the attention of the Commission after the election packages had been sent to electors and a number of electors had already voted. The court decided that a fresh election was required to be held.

ELECTION PACKAGES

Design

Election package design is important as electors may overlook that an election is occurring and discard their mail. In 2005, the design helped focus attention on the fact that there was to be a local government election and that a postal vote was included in the envelope.



Figure 5: Package design

The package comprised six separate parts:

1. ballot paper(s);
2. postal vote information;
3. candidate profiles;
4. ballot paper envelope;
5. dispatch envelope; and
6. reply paid return envelope.

Ballot Paper

Ballot papers were printed using a combination of colours to avoid confusion when two or more ballot papers were included in an election package. Security paper was used to prevent unauthorised reproduction as the words 'illegal copy' would appear 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.

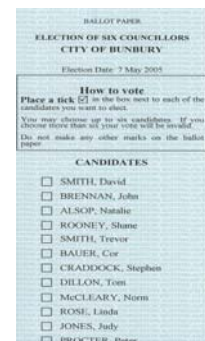


Figure 6: Ballot paper

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 for each local government was in a generic form this year for cost saving purposes. It was designed with a view to guiding the elector through the process of completing a postal vote.

The brochure was written in plain English with brief instructions. Basic information was 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.



Figure 7: Candidate profiles

Ballot Paper Envelope

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

An additional message on the back of the envelope ***'it is your responsibility to ensure this envelope is either posted with Australia Post or hand delivered to your local government authority'*** was included.

If the elector had changed his or her address or other details, this could be recorded on the reverse of the certificate.

You MUST sign this declaration

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

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

Figure 8: Front of elector's certificate

Has your name or address changed?

New name	
New residential address	Postcode
New postal address	Postcode

Figure 9: 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 directs the envelopes to the Commission and delivers them to the postal vote checking centre in the period leading up to election day.

Election Package Dispatch

There were 823,982 packages dispatched to electors in 128 wards in 47 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 more than three weeks to return their ballot papers to the postal vote checking centre. Metropolitan electors were allowed a three week period. Most metropolitan electors received their packages a day after posting.

Packages from 66% of all electors choosing to vote were returned within the first week of receiving them.

REPLACEMENT, PROVISIONAL AND ABSENT VOTING

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.

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

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.

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

There were 2,257 replacement voting papers issued for 47 postal voting local governments in 2005, an average of 48 per local government. This compared with 3,063 replacement voting papers for 53 local governments in 2003, an average of 58 per local government.

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

For example, the City of Cockburn recorded an increase of 74 replacement voting papers. This was attributed to the election being for mayor, councillor and referendum with many voters who said that they had discarded their packages and wanted to vote or who had made mistakes on their ballot papers.

The Town of Claremont and the City of Subiaco recorded similar increases, which were attributed to vigorous campaigning of workers assisting with the elections of the mayor, and local issues.

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.

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

There were 96 provisional voting papers issued for 19 postal voting local governments in 2005. This compared with 113 provisional voting papers in 2003.

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 (6 April 2005) and ended on the 4th day before election day (3 May 2005).

Local government staff members 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 Tom Wilding Pavilion at the Claremont Showgrounds was used as a postal vote checking centre with security and accessibility for visitors.



Figure 10: Checking votes at the central scanning centre

Casual staff members were employed in teams to process ballot paper envelopes returned by voters. Of the 823,982 packages sent to electors, voters returned 307,700, a response rate of 37.34%.

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; and
- recording the results of the election following the count.

Return of Packages

Mail was delivered to the postal vote checking centre by Australia Post on a daily basis from 18 April 2005.

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

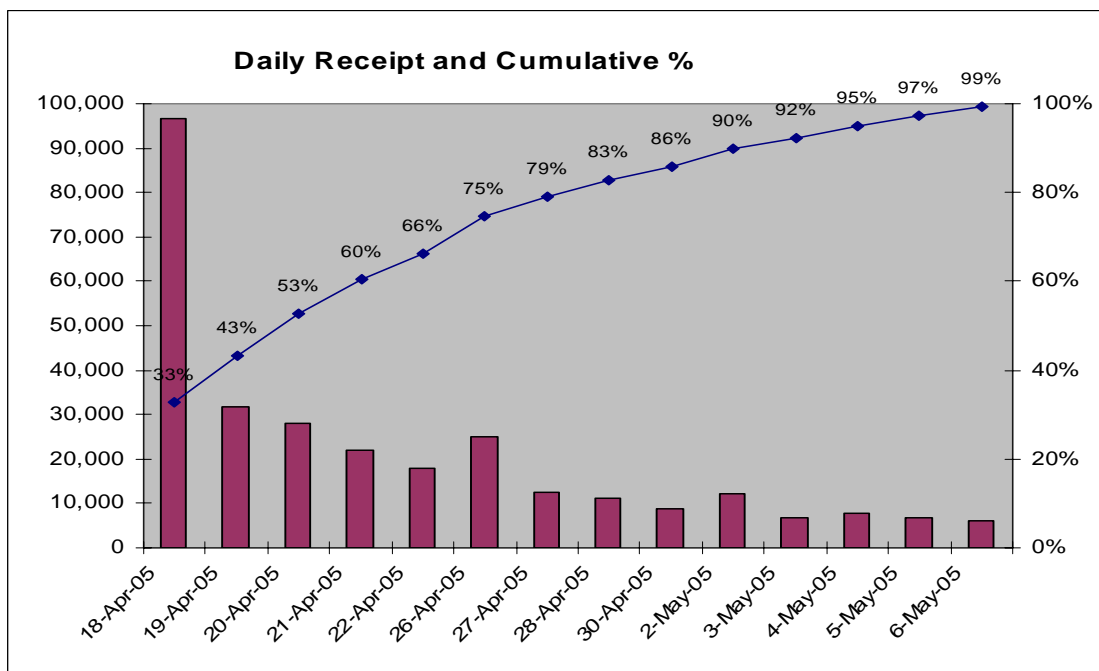


Chart 3: Postal Vote Package Receipts from Australia Post. Data Source: EMSWA

The 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 was consistent with 2003.

The Commission placed this information on its web site 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 web site 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; and
- removing the ballot paper from the ballot paper envelope without examination and placing it in a ballot box.



Figure 11: Removing votes from the ballot paper envelopes

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 scrutineers were given the option of visiting the postal vote checking centre to view the postal voting process. Local government staff members 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 AEC 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.

Multiple Voting

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

A total of 30 electors were found to have lodged more than one election package. Following investigation, 12 electors were asked to explain their actions.

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; and
- 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 2005 with 2003.

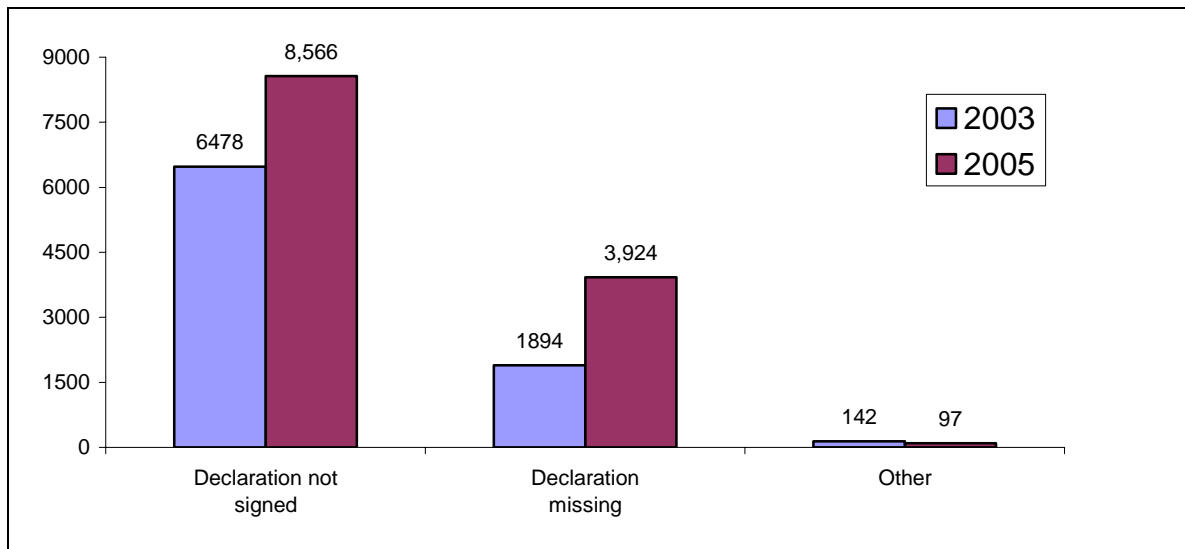


Chart 4: Rejected Packages in 2003 and 2005. Data Source: EMSWA

In 2005, 12,587 or 4.09% of packages were rejected from the total of 307,700 packages returned. This is significantly higher than 2003 when 8,514 or 2.68% of packages were rejected from the total of 317,313 packages returned.

A total of 8,566 voters did not sign the elector's certificate in 2005. 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 or concerns of privacy.

Dispatch of Ballot Boxes to Counting Centres

Prior to election day, sealed ballot boxes containing ballot papers were dispatched from the postal vote checking centre under secure conditions to all returning officers. On election 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 election day in each local government. Generally 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:

- City of Swan
- Shire of Ashburton

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 polling place for processing.

Packages Received on Election Day

A total of 8,609 election packages were received on election day at the local government offices, 2.8% 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 country local governments and elections that included a mayoral vacancy.

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.

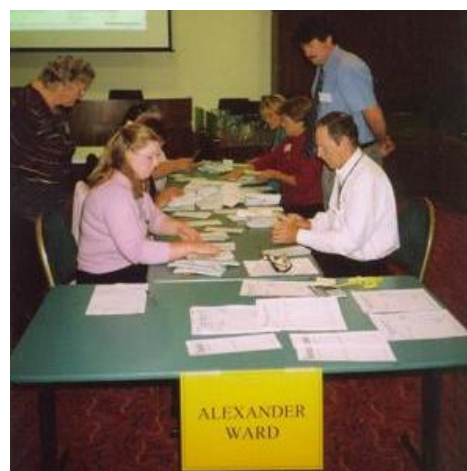


Figure 12: Counting votes at the City of Wanneroo

Where the number of vacancies was greater than two in any one ward, with a greater number of candidates, 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 were used to key each vote for a candidate on a ballot paper. The software program tallied each entry per candidate to arrive at a result.

Local governments that used a computer count included:

- City of Bunbury
- Shire of Collie
- Shire of Dardanup
- Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup
- City of Geraldton
- City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder
- Town of Kwinana
- City of Perth
- City of Rockingham

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 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 (ABC) and posted to the Commission's internet site www.waec.wa.gov.au.

The results were published in *The West Australian* on Monday 9 May 2005. The *Report 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 13: Declaring the results

Sitting Members

Of the 562 candidates who nominated for elections in postal voting local governments, 195 were sitting councillors (34.70%). Of the 290 vacancies filled, sitting councillors were elected to 166 positions (57.24%) while other candidates were elected to 124 positions (42.76%).

Of the sitting candidates for postal voting local governments, 85.13% were re-elected. This compared with 70.42% in 2003.

Of the four candidates who nominated for the one voting in person local government, three were sitting councillors (75%); 100% of the sitting candidates were re-elected.

Sitting councillors who sought another term in local government in the 2005 elections were again recognised by voters. The majority who were seeking re-election were successful.

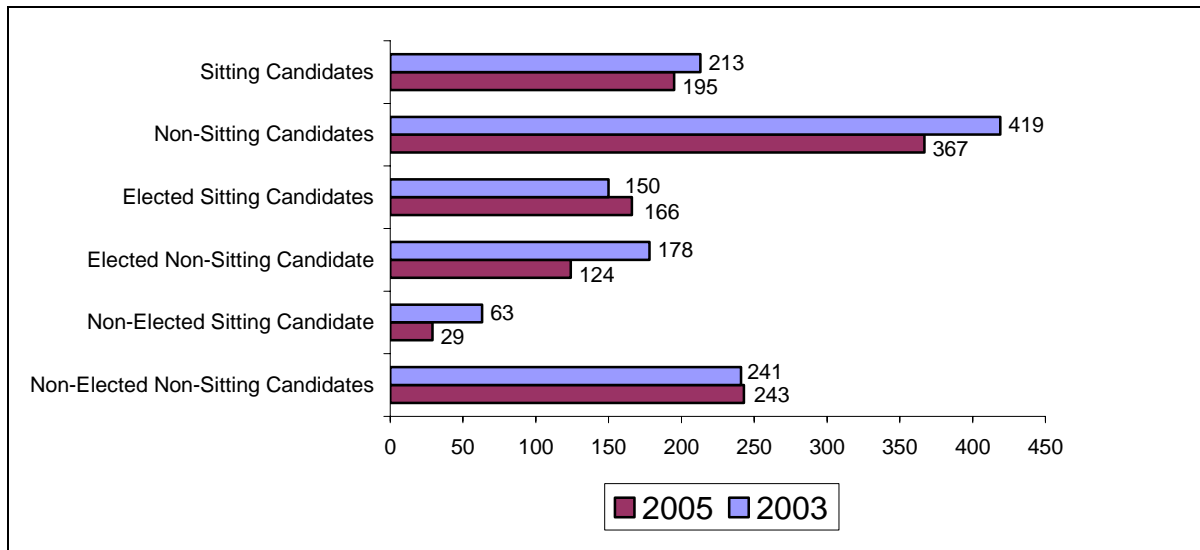


Chart 5: A Comparison of the Electoral Success of Sitting and Non-sitting Members in 2005 and 2003. Data Source: EMSWA

Candidate Statistics

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

	Councillor	Mayor/President	Total
Vacancies	282	9	291
Vacancies Filled Unopposed	71	0	71
Vacancies Uncontested	1	0	1
Vacancies Contested	210	9	219
Total Candidates at Close of Nominations	532	30	562
Male Candidates	382	22	404
Female Candidates	150	8	158
Vacancies Elected Unopposed	71	0	71
Male Candidates Elected Unopposed	58	0	58
Female Candidates Elected Unopposed	13	0	13
Total Candidates in Contested Elections	461	30	491
Male Candidates in Contested Elections	324	22	346
Female Candidates in Contested Elections	137	8	145
Total Candidates Elected	281	9	290
Males Elected	194	6	200
Females Elected	87	3	90
Male Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	136	6	142
Female Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	74	3	77
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-Nominating			195
Sitting Councillors/Mayors not Re-Nominating			96
Total Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-Elected	160	6	166
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-elected in Contested Elections	108	6	114
Sitting Councillors/Mayors Re-elected Unopposed	52	0	52
Sitting Councillors/Mayors not Re-elected	24	5	29

Table 2: Summary Candidate Statistics. Data Source: EMSWA

The table below provides summary candidate statistics for the one voting in person election.

	Councillor
Vacancies	4
Vacancies Filled Unopposed	0
Vacancies Uncontested	0
Vacancies Contested	0
Total Candidates at Close of Nominations	4
Male Candidates	3
Female Candidates	1
Vacancies Elected Unopposed	4
Male Candidates Elected Unopposed	3
Female Candidates Elected Unopposed	1
Total Candidates in Contested Elections	0
Male Candidates in Contested Elections	0
Female Candidates in Contested Elections	0
Total Candidates Elected	4
Males Candidates Elected	3
Females Candidates Elected	1
Male Candidates Elected in Contested Elections	0
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	0
Sitting Councillors Re-elected Unopposed	3
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 voting method in 2005 and 2003.

A small number of postal voting local governments recorded a decrease in their participation rate in 2005 when compared to 2003.

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	11
1	8
1	6
1	5
2	4
1	3
1	2
2	1

Table 4: Decrease in participation in 2005. 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 which had the effect of lowering the participation rate.

Conversely, most postal voting local governments increased their participation in 2005, as follows:

Number of Local Governments	Increase in Participation %
5	1
6	2
5	3
1	4
5	5
3	6
1	7
1	8
0	9
1	10
2	11

Table 5: Increase in participation 2005. 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 2005 generally reflected this trend with a higher level of interest in the country than in the metropolitan area.

Local Government	2003 Voter Participation	2005 Voter Participation
City of Bunbury	37.2%	43.2%
City of Canning	31.7%	33.2%
City of Cockburn	32.4%	37.2%
City of Fremantle	44.3%	50.1%
City of Geraldton	35.7%	37.8%
City of Mandurah	36.9%	38.2%
City of Subiaco	42.6%	44.8%
Town of Claremont	46.0%	49.3%
Town of Cottesloe	44.2%	55.4%

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

The City of Albany held a mayoral election in 2003 and a referendum in 2005. The interest in the referendum question ‘Do you support 7 days trading’ resulted in an increase in turnout by 10% to 58.8%.

The City of Cockburn elected a mayor in 2005 and also held a referendum in 2005. This should have generated even higher community interest but the result was consistent with the trend towards a 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 2005. The previous trend towards lower voter interest has been reversed with all local governments listed showing an increase in voter participation.

Local Government	2003 Voter Participation	2005 Voter Participation
City of Canning	31.7%	33.2%
City of Cockburn	32.4%	37.2%
City of Gosnells	29.9%	30.4%
City of Stirling	31.8%	32.5%
City of Swan	33.1%	34.8%

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

There were no local governments, new to the postal voting method in 2005.

Local governments that used the postal voting method in 2003 and reverted back to the voting in person method in 2005 recorded a decrease in their participation rate:

Local Government	2003 Postal Election	2005 Voting in Person Election
Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes	46.2%	31.6%
Shire of Nannup	56.3%	46.3%
Town of Northam	39.2%	16.2%
Shire of Ravensthorpe	67.0%	62.1%

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

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

In 2005, a total of 307,700 postal voting election packages were returned. A total of 93.56% of eligible local government electors had access to the postal voting method of voting with an average participation rate of 37.34%. The 6.44% of local government electors using the voting in person method of voting produced an average participation rate of 20.28%. An average figure is not strictly comparable as different districts, wards and elector numbers were involved.

Participation rates for voting in person elections were 25.9% in 2001, 22.04% in 2003 and 20.28% in 2005.

A full comparison between local governments using the postal election process in 2005 and 2003 is at Appendix 14.

Participation Ratio for Metropolitan and Country Districts

Of the 307,700 postal voting electors in 2005, 74.46% were from metropolitan local governments and 25.54% from country local governments. When compared with 2003, 317,313 postal voters returned packages, with 78.7% in the metropolitan area and 21.2% in the country.

The Town of Cottesloe recorded the highest metropolitan participation rate in 2005 with 55.44%. This compared with 44.2% in 2003.

The City of Gosnells recorded the lowest metropolitan participation rate in 2005 with 30.43%. This compared with 29.9% in 2003.

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

The Shire of Mount Marshall recorded the highest participation rate (77.42%) for country local governments in 2005. This compared with 77.5% in 2003.

The Shire of East Pilbara recorded the lowest participation rate (31.8%) for country local governments in 2005. This compared with 35.4% in 2003.

Participation Rates for Metropolitan Local Governments

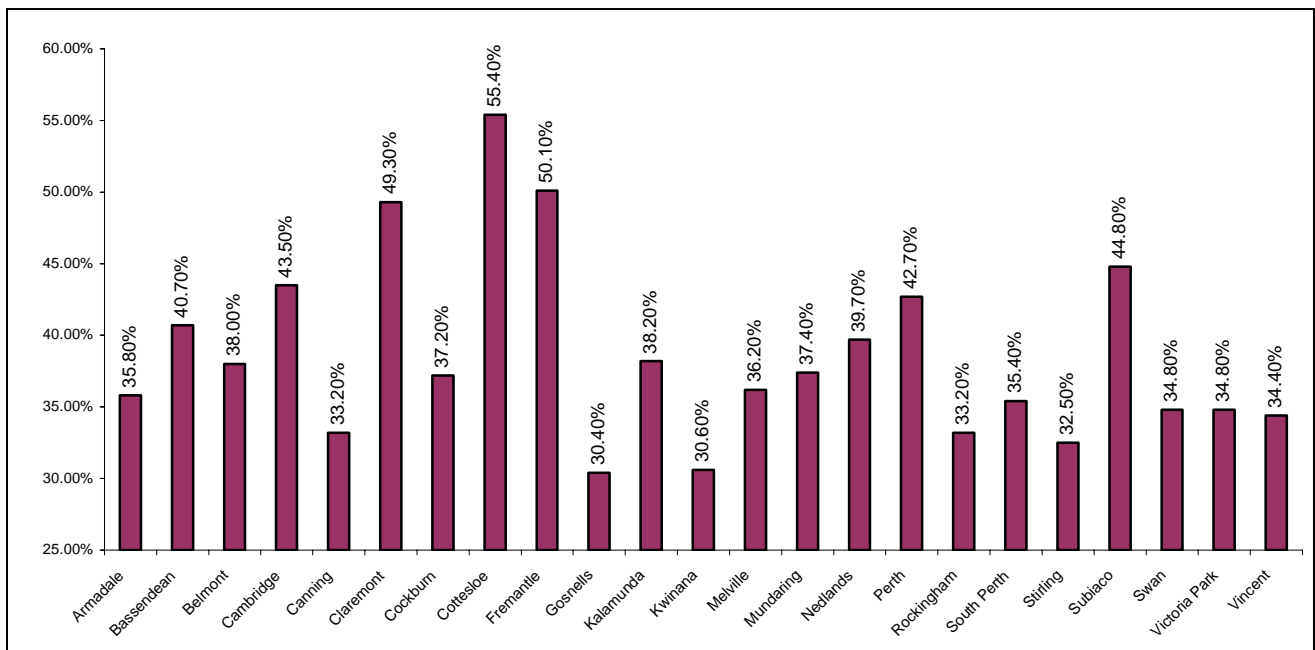


Chart 6: Participation Rate – Metropolitan Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

Participation Rates for Country Local Governments

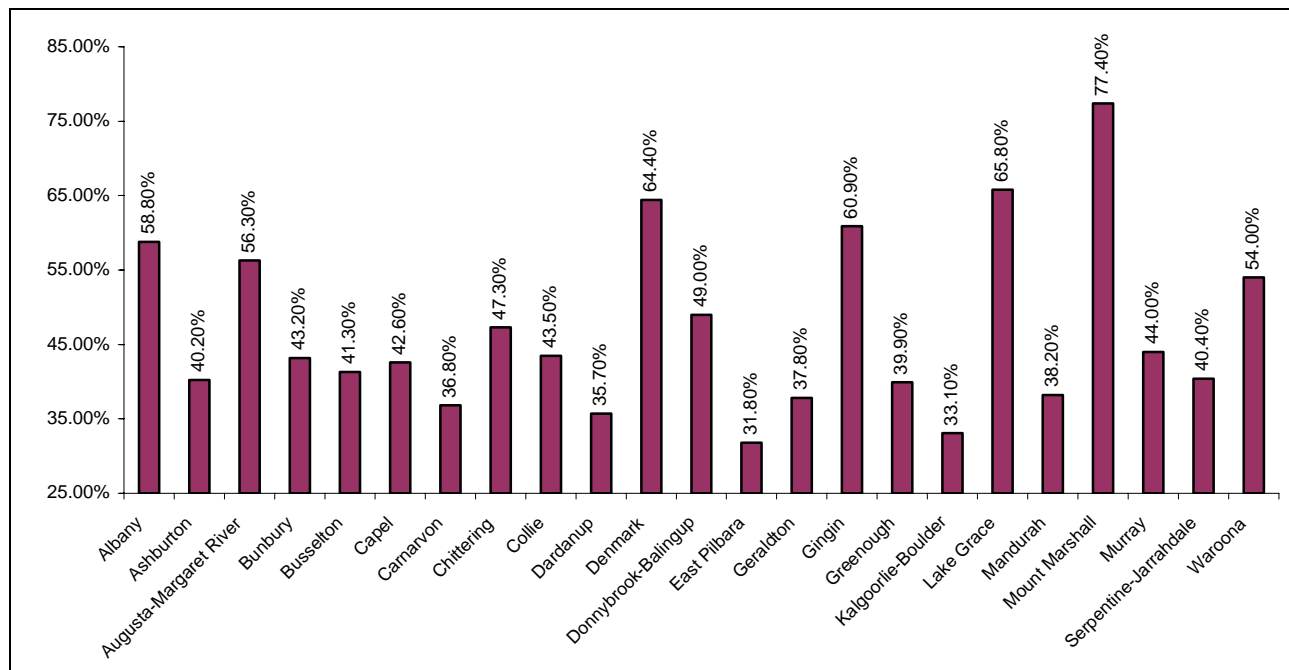


Chart 7: Participation Rate – Country Local Governments. Data Source: EMSWA

Age of Electors and Voters

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

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.

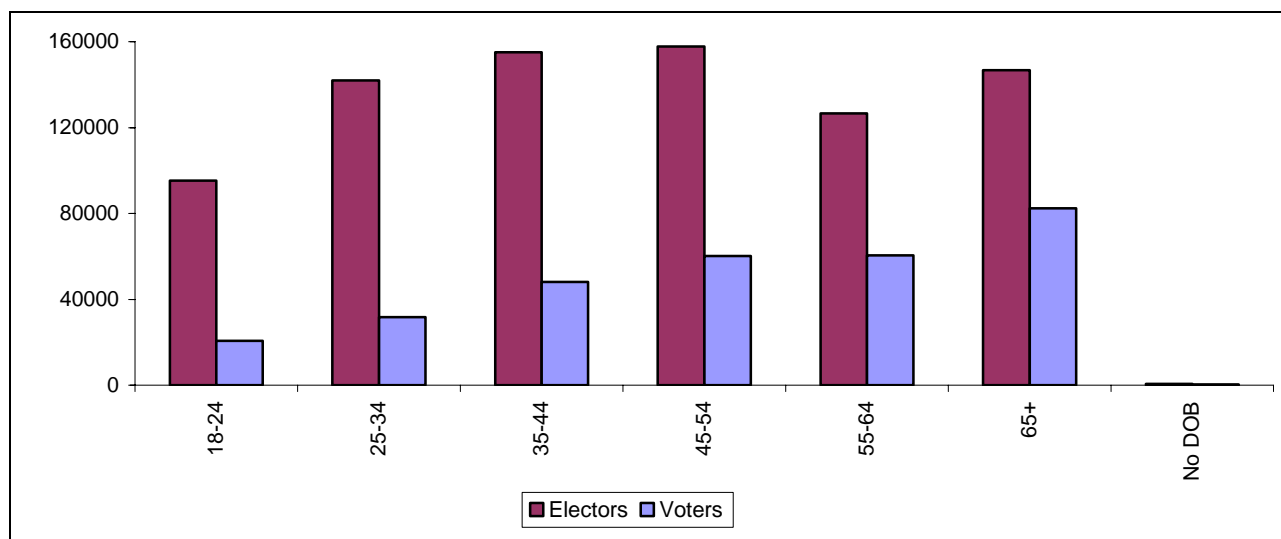


Chart 8: Age of Electors and Voters. Data Source: EMSWA

In 2003 postal voting recorded lower voter participation (%) when compared to enrolment in the following age groups:

- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44

In 2005, the same trend is evident.

In the following age groups, higher voter participation (%) was recorded in 2003 when compared to enrolment:

- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65+.

The same trend is evident for 2005.

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 and 2003 results supported this observation which re-occurred in 2005. 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 was represented almost equally on the electoral roll for the 2005 elections. Women accounted for 51.4% of electors and 52.9% of voters. Men accounted for 48.6% of electors and 47.1% of voters.

In 2003, women represented 51.5% of electors and 52.1% of voters. Men represented 48.5% of electors and 47.3% of voters.

Women continued to demonstrate a high interest in voting for local government elections with a difference of between 2% to 3% as compared to men for the 2003 and 2005 elections. Previously, this was not being translated into representation in local government. However, the number of women elected in 2005 actually increased and the number of men decreased.

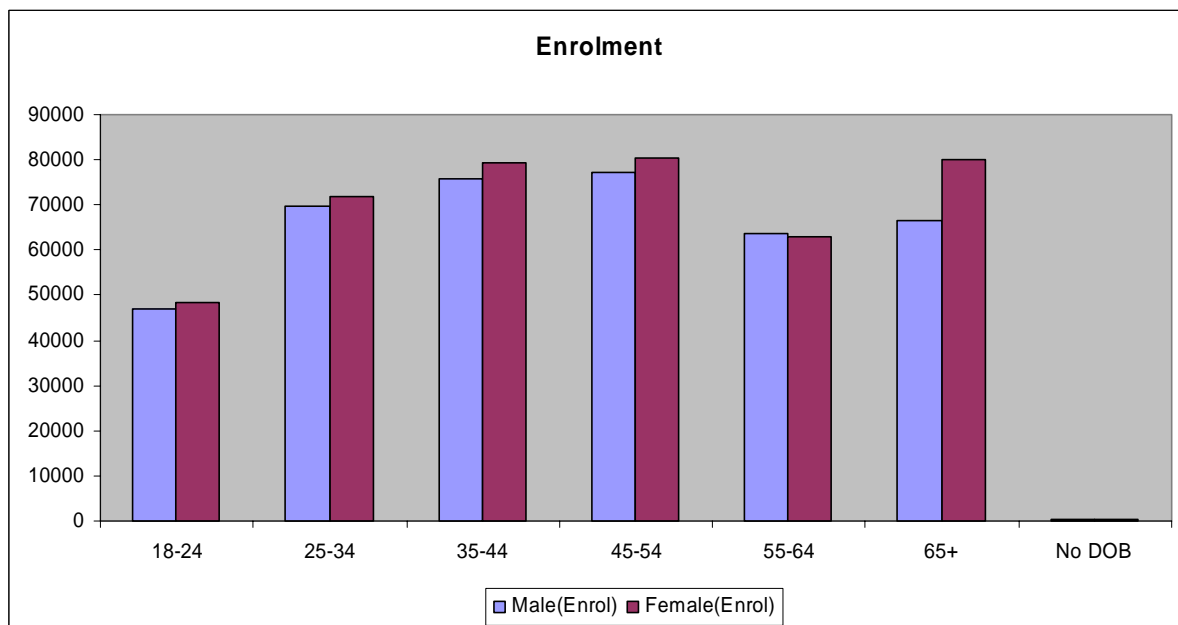


Chart 9: Enrolment by Age Group and Gender. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth or gender was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

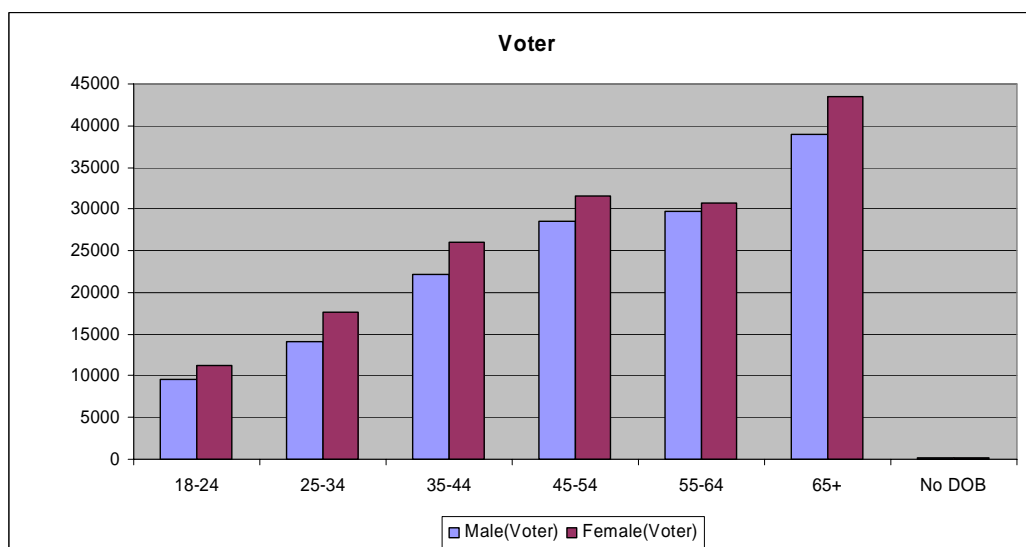


Chart 10: Voters by Age Group and Gender. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth or gender was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

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 postcode range but with ease of

access from the city such as Mandurah and Serpentine-Jarrahdale.

In 2005, 50 local governments held postal elections, with 24 from the metropolitan area and 26 from the country and outer-metropolitan areas.

Electors in the metropolitan area accounted for 77.41% of postal electors with the majority in age groups 35–44 and 45–54. Voters accounted for 73.85% with the majority in age groups 55–64 and 65+. This is illustrated in the chart below.

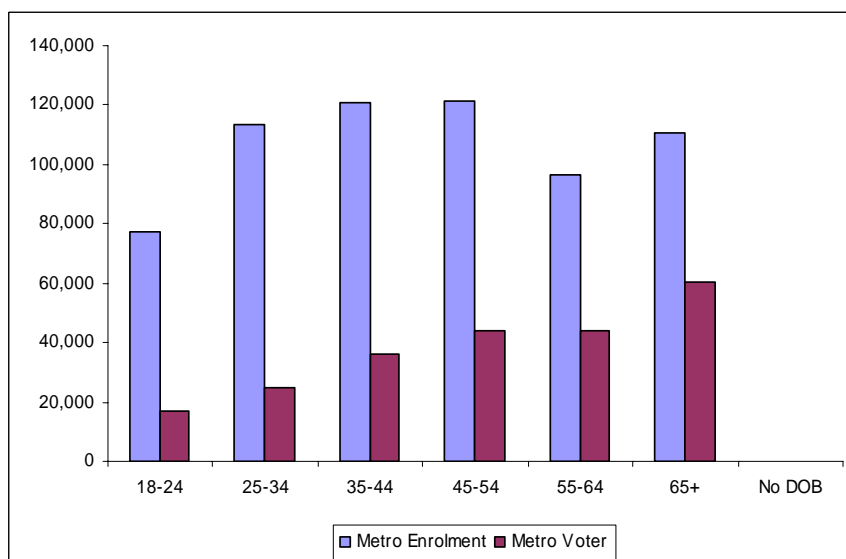


Chart 11: Enrolment and Voting in the Metropolitan Area. (Note: Includes voters whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

The 2005 elector and voter trend for metropolitan postal voting local governments was similar to the situation in 2003.

In 2003, 55 local governments held postal elections, with 24 from the metropolitan area and 31 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 65+.

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 2005, electors accounted for 22.23% of postal electors with the majority in age groups 45–54 and 65+. Voters accounted for 25.54% with the majority in age groups 55–64 and 65+. This is illustrated in the following chart.

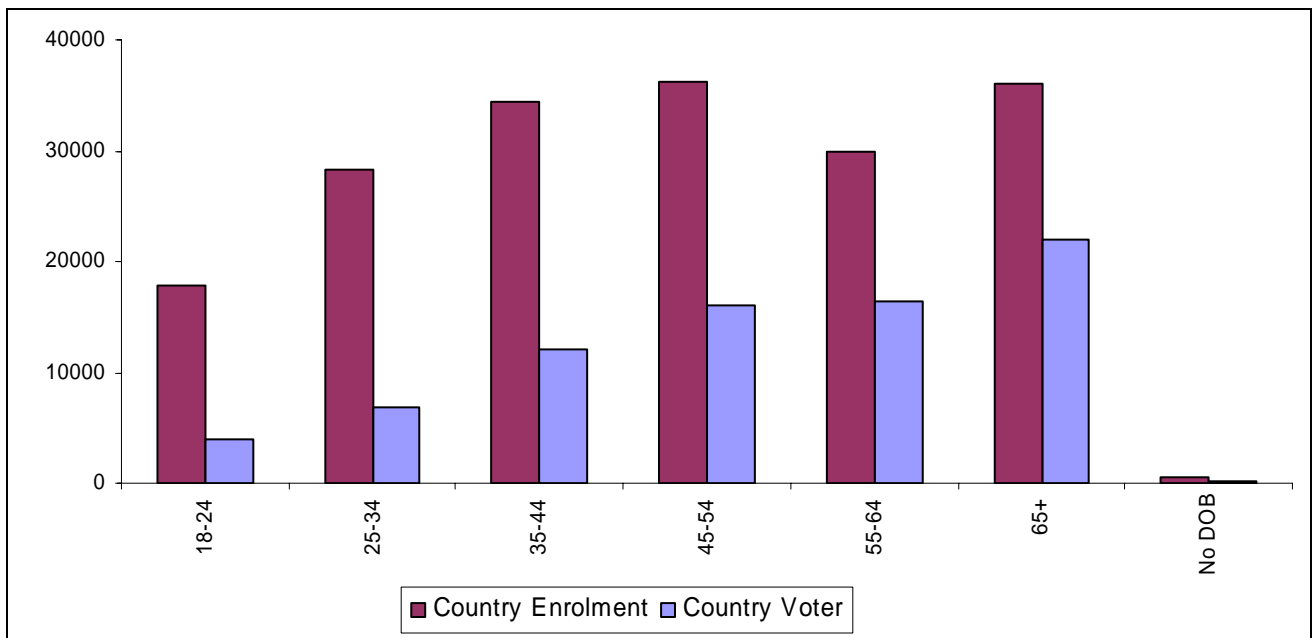


Chart 12: Enrolment and Voting in the Country. (Note: Includes voters whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

Again, the 2005 elector and voter trend for country postal voting local governments was not unlike the situation in 2003.

Electors accounted for 17.8% of postal electors in 2003 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+. In 2005, country electors accounted for 22.59% and 26.15% voted. In 2001, country electors accounted for 17.8% and 21.2% voted.

Country electors continued to vote in greater proportion to their enrolment than metropolitan electors. This is illustrated in chart 13.

In 2005, of the 77.77% of metropolitan electors, only 35.70% actually voted. However, in the country, with only 26.15% of electors, the number of voters was 43.08%.

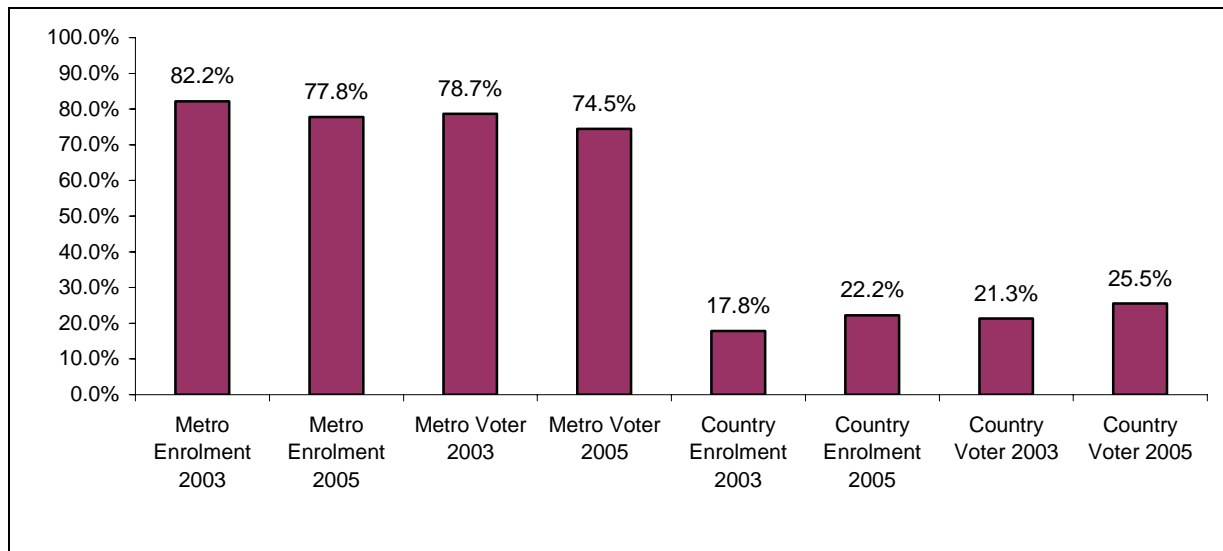


Chart 13: Metropolitan Enrolment and Voting Compared with Country Enrolment and Voting. Data Source: EMSWA

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 823,982 electors were sent a postal voting election package in 2005. Of this number, 97.7% were resident electors and 2.3% owners and occupiers. This is illustrated in the chart below.

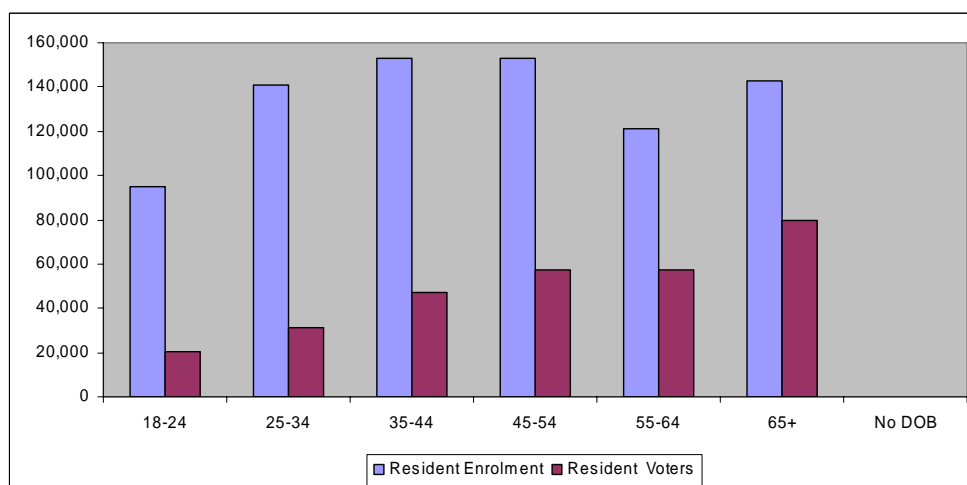


Chart 14: Residents' Enrolment and Voter Participation. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

Electors who voted included 96.7% residents and 3.3% owners and occupiers. This is illustrated in the chart below.

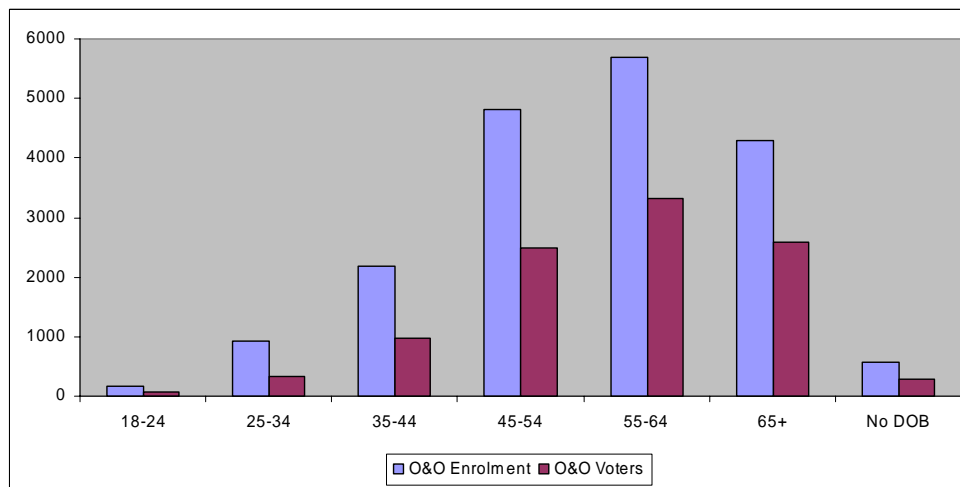


Chart 15: Owner and Occupier Enrolment and Voter Participation. (Note: Includes electors whose date of birth was not supplied.) Data Source: EMSWA

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

There were 50 local governments participating in postal voting elections in 2005 serving 85% of eligible electors on the roll. Of the total number of electors who voted in the 2005 elections, postal voters accounted for 93.56%.

This compared to 55 local governments in 2003, serving 86% 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 2005.

	Postal	% of Total	In-person	% of Total
Districts participating	50	35.2	92	64.8%
Total no. of vacancies	291	40.0%	436	60.0%
No. of vacancies uncontested (no candidates)	1	9.0%	9	90%
No. of vacancies with candidates elected unopposed	72	23.3%	237	76.7%
Total no. of vacancies contested	218	53.4%	190	46.6%
Number of electors in contested elections	816,951	88.7%	104,465	11.3%
Number of voters	303,592	93.5%	21,184	6.5%

Table 9: Summary of Participation in 2005 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%. In 2005 the average rate was 37%. 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 2005, 50 local governments used the postal voting method. Of these 47 local governments comprising 823,982 electors and 307,700 voters, proceeded to an election and achieved an average participation of 37.34% the turnout varies considerably, again, according to the elector base. In 2005:

- 1 local government had an elector base of between 301 and 999 electors, comprising 421 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 62 electors of which, 48 persons voted with an average participation rate of 77.42%.
- 3 local governments had an elector base of between 1,000 and 2,499 electors, comprising 5,718 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 3,322 electors of which, 1,713 persons voted with an average participation rate of 51.57%.
- 6 local governments had an elector base of between 2,500 and 4,999 electors, comprising 19,789 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 12,768 electors of which, 6340 persons voted with an average participation rate of 49.66%.
- 11 local governments had an elector base of between 5,000 and 9,999 electors, comprising 81,541 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 69,572 electors of which, 30,950 persons voted with an average participation rate of 44.49%.
- 10 local governments had an elector base of between 10,000 and 19,999 electors, comprising 158,705 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 157,006 electors of which, 61,448 persons voted with an average participation rate of 39.14%.
- 5 local governments had an elector base of between 20,000 and 29,999 electors, comprising 112,621 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 86,142 electors of which, 38,277 persons voted with an average participation rate of 44.43%.
- 3 local governments had an elector base of between 30,000 and 39,999 electors, comprising 105,036 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 81,864 electors of which, 30,779 persons voted with an average participation rate of 37.60%.
- 2 local governments had an elector base of between 40,000 and 49,999 electors, comprising 97,223 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 97,223 electors of which, 34,206 persons voted with an average participation rate of 35.15%.
- 3 local governments had an elector base of between 50,000 and 59,999 electors, comprising 163,802 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 126,223 electors of which, 41,089 persons voted with an average participation rate of 32.55%.
- 3 local governments had an elector base of 60,000 plus electors, comprising 249,195 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 189,800 electors of which, 62,850 persons voted with an average participation rate of 33.11%.

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

	Electors	Voters	No. of Local Governments
0-300			
301-999	62	48	1
1,000-2,499	3,322	1,713	3
2,500-4,999	12,768	6,340	6
5,000-9,999	69,572	30,950	11
10,000-19,999	157,006	61,448	10
20,000-29,999	86,142	38,277	5
30,000-39,999	81,864	30,779	3
40,000-49,999	97,223	34,206	2
50,000-59,999	126,223	41,089	3
60,000 plus	189,800	62,850	3
Total	823,982	307,700	47

Table 10: Summary of electors and voters by group of postal voting local governments. Data Source: EMSWA

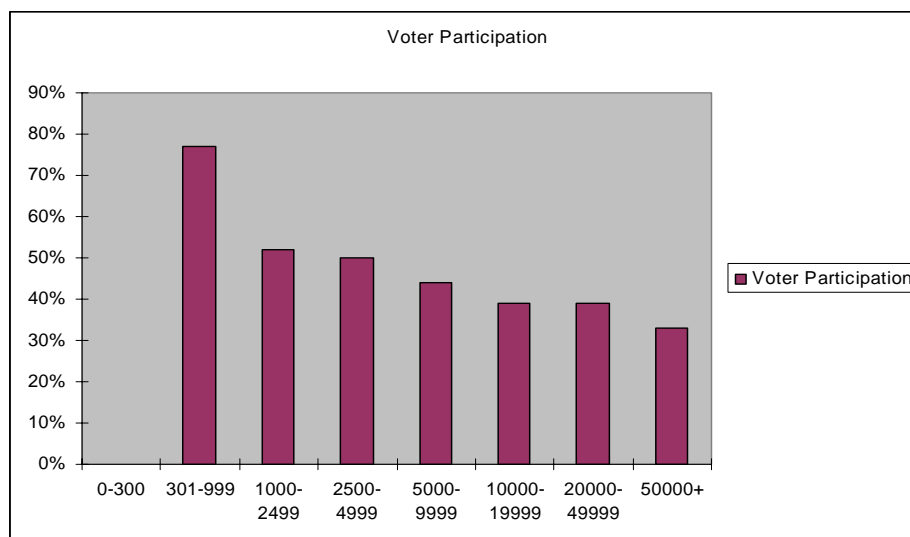


Chart 16: Voter Participation, Postal local governments according to elector base. Data Source: EMSWA

Voting In Person Election Participation

Appendix 15 indicates the average participation rate for voting in person local governments in 2005.

As established in 2003 and again evident in 2005, is that electors participate readily in voting in person elections in districts with a small population.

In 2005, 91 local governments used the in-person method. Of these 53 local governments comprising 104,465 electors and 21,184 voters, proceeded to an election and achieved an average participation of 20.28%. The turnout varies considerably, again, according to the elector base. In 2005:

- 2 local governments had an elector base of less than 300 electors, comprising 466 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 360 electors of which, 225 persons voted, with an average participation rate of 62.50%.
- 29 local governments had an elector base of between 301 and 999 electors, comprising 18,978 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 12,412 electors of which, 5,487 persons voted, with an average participation rate of 44.21%.

- 8 local governments had an elector base of between 1,000 and 2,499 electors, comprising 14,414 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 7,552 electors of which, 2,646 persons voted, with an average participation rate of 35.04%.
- 7 local governments had an elector base of between 2,500 to 4,999 electors, comprising 23,537 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 21,170 electors of which, 5,081 persons voted with an average participation rate of 24.00%.
- 5 local governments had an elector base of 5,000 to 9,999 electors, comprising 37,269 persons enrolled. Contested elections included 31,696 electors of which, 4,713 persons voted with an average participation rate of 14.87%.
- 1 local government had an elector base of 10,000 to 19,999 electors, comprising 12,769 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 12,769 electors of which, 1,272 persons voted with an average participation rate of 9.96%.

- 1 local government had an elector base of 30,000 to 39,999 electors, comprising 39,377 persons enrolled. Contested wards included 18,506 electors of which, 1,760 persons voted with an average participation rate of 9.51%.

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

	Electors	Voters	No. of Local Governments
0-300	360	225	2
301-999	12,412	5,487	29
1,000-2,499	7,552	2,646	8
2,500-4,999	21,170	5,081	7
5,000-9,999	31,696	4,713	5
10,000-19,999	12,769	1,272	1
30,000-39,999	18,506	1,760	1
Total	104,465	21,184	53

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

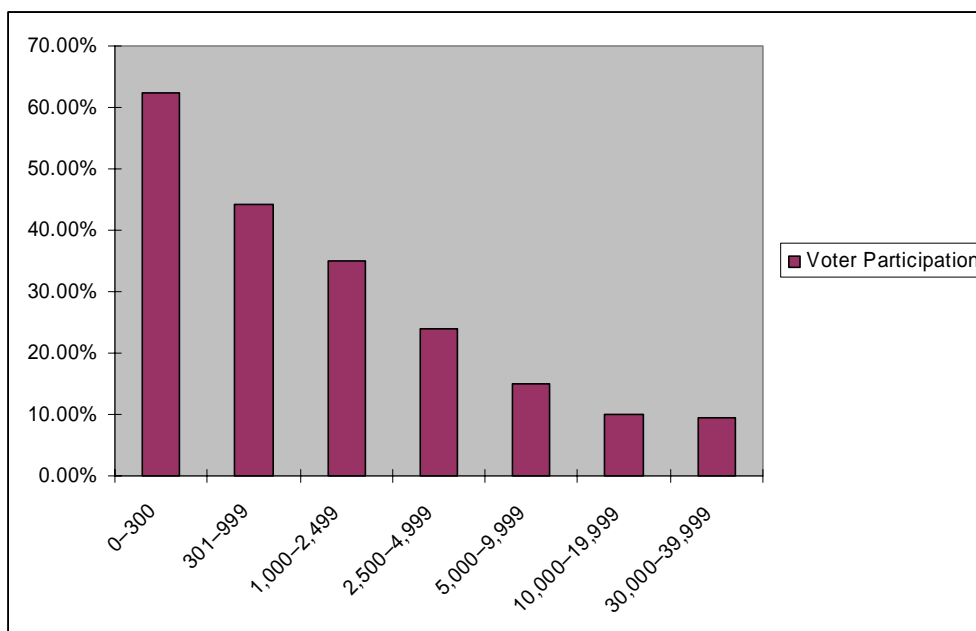


Chart 17: Voter Participation, voting in person local governments according to elector base. Data Source: EMSWA

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 for illustration purposes.

	Participation %		No. of Local Governments
	Postal	Voting In Person	
0-300		62.50%	2
301-999	77.42%	44.21%	30
1,000-2,499	51.57%	35.04%	11
2,500-4,999	49.66%	24.00%	13
5,000-9,999	44.49%	14.87%	16
10,000-19,999	39.14%	9.96%	11
20,000-29,999	44.43%		5
30,000-39,999	37.60%	9.51%	4
40,000-49,999	35.18%		2
50,000-59,999	32.55%		3
60,000 plus	33.11%		3
Total			100

Table 12: Summary comparison of voter participation, voting in person and postal according to elector base. Data Source: EMSWA

The following table provides a comparison between postal and voting in person elections in neighbouring districts in 2005.

Postal	%	Voting in person	%
Bassendean	40.7		
Belmont	38.0	Bayswater	9.51
Stirling	32.5		
Vincent	34.4		
Denmark	64.4	Manjimup	16.31
Collie	43.5	Harvey	9.96
Bunbury	43.2		

Table 13: 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 look at ways in which to encourage the community to participate and one way is to use the postal voting 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 71% as was the case with the Shire of Wandering.

Large metropolitan electorates generally obtain relatively low participation rates. For example, the City of Stirling with an elector base of 122,790 had a participation rate in 2005 of 32.53%. The same could be said of the City of Gosnells.

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, 2001 and 2003. 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 has plateaued, having remained

fairly constant over the last three ordinary postal elections. Individual local governments still experience fluctuations where 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 has continued to increase slightly and this is a reflection of the level of community involvement in local government.

It is apparent that 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.

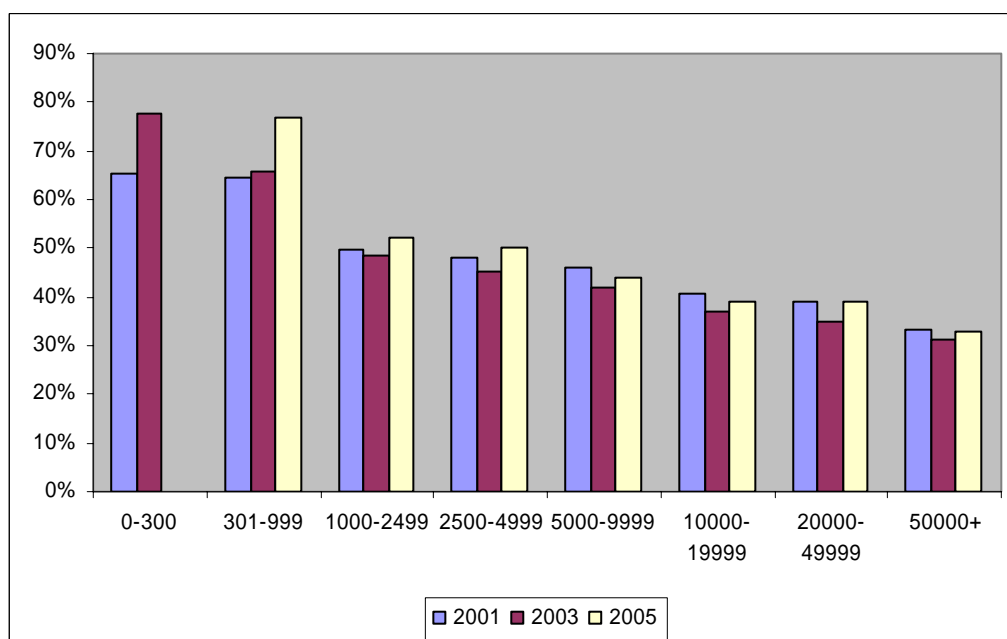


Chart 18: Postal election participation over three ordinary elections by size of elector base. Data Source: EMSWA

LATE MAIL

Some electors did not return their mail in time for the count, despite a special delivery being arranged on election day. Details for each local government are at Appendix 12.

Despite information regarding the election being included in the election package, some electors were not aware of the time it could take to return postal voting packages. Some voters were under the impression that voting is compulsory for local

government elections and elected 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.

There were 12,704 election packages returned as unclaimed mail in 2005, representing 1.54% of packages dispatched. This compared with 21,430 in 2003 or 2.36% of packages dispatched.

In 2005, 2,733 electors (0.33% of the packages dispatched) returned their packages too late to be included in the poll. This compared with 5,916 electors (0.65%) in 2003 who were unable to participate in the poll.

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 was forwarded to the AEC to verify an ongoing entitlement to be enrolled. If this entitlement no longer existed, the process to have their names removed from the roll was commenced.

Details for each local government are at Appendix 13.

COSTS

Costs for the elections are allocated on a 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) basis.

All other costs not 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 fixed costs, such as fees paid to returning officers and advertising. If the costs are apportioned per elector, they appear to be very high. Conversely, smaller local governments tend to benefit from the sharing of indirect costs if they are apportioned over a large elector base.

Larger local governments are still affected by direct fixed costs, however, the cost per elector is relatively low due to the larger elector base that costs are apportioned over, when compared to the smaller local governments.

The Commission is mindful of the cost of conducting elections and endeavours to maximise 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 2004–2005 financial year and the balance payable when full costs are known.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

For its report on the 2003 local government postal elections, the Commission placed on record some thoughts about possible legislative and procedural changes that would assist the election process.

Some progress has occurred with the following changes implemented:

- Legislation was amended to 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.
- The election timeline was modified with the nominations period reduced from 15 days to 8 days. This allows more 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 4.5 million separate items had to be prepared, proofed, printed and then assembled into 823,982 voting packages and dispatched to electors within 10–14 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.

The following issues remain of concern:

- 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 11.00 am on a Thursday), with counting occurring shortly thereafter, obviating the need for polling places to be open on a Saturday, when in fact, from experience, only a small number of electors 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.
- Amendments should include the requirement of electors to include their date of birth on the elector's certificate.
- 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. This will ensure 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.
- 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 2007 elections.