



**ELECTORAL
COMMISSION**
TE KAITIAKI TAKE KŌWHIRI

BRIEFING TO THE INCOMING MINISTER

DECEMBER 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The Electoral Commission (Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri) is proud of the role it has in ensuring New Zealanders entitled to vote can play a full part in our healthy democratic system. This includes participation in general elections, by-elections and referendums.

This briefing sets the scene and provides the strategic context for our work, as well as some of the more immediate matters that we have been progressing. The briefing has three parts:

- **Part One: About the Commission** describes the Commission's purpose and performance framework
- **Part Two: Opportunities and challenges** discusses key opportunities and challenges for the next election cycle
- **Part Three: Upcoming matters for consideration** outlines key matters we would like to discuss with you in the short to medium term.

Appendices provide an overview of the 2020 General Election and elections generally, as well as the Commission's functions, governance, and organisation structure.

The Commission is experienced in all aspects of the electoral system from enrolling, to voting and vote counting, and can provide you with robust, informed, and evidence-based advice to support you in your role as Minister of Justice, responsible for the Electoral Act 1993.

The Commission has just successfully delivered a complex election in some of the most challenging circumstances. We are currently reviewing how we performed and what our priorities will be for the coming three years. Until that work is completed we cannot be specific about our resource requirements. However, we would welcome an early opportunity to discuss the immediate and long-term opportunities and challenges for the electoral sector and the Commission.

PART ONE – ABOUT THE COMMISSION

Purpose

The Electoral Commission is established by section 4B of the Electoral Act 1993 and is an Independent Crown Entity under the Crown Entities Act 2004. The statutory objective of the Commission is to administer the electoral system impartially, efficiently, effectively, and in a way that:

- facilitates participation in parliamentary democracy
- promotes understanding of the electoral system, and
- maintains confidence in the administration of the electoral system.

In carrying out its electoral functions, the Electoral Act requires the Commission to act independently. Widespread trust in the electoral system – the accuracy of the roll, the integrity of the election process, and confidence in election results – contributes to the acceptance of an election outcome as legitimate. A high level of participation in the electoral process is an important aspect of this trust. The more people take part, the more the result can be regarded as a legitimate reflection of the will of the people.

The Commission plays a critical role in ensuring New Zealanders can participate in elections by making enrolling and voting as easy as possible for all voters. In carrying out certain statutory functions, for example in relation to party funding and registration, the Commission works directly with political parties, both inside and outside Parliament.

The Commission is a relatively small organisation, with funding of \$176 million for the 3-year 2020 General Election cycle, and a permanent staff of approximately 113 people, comprising 54 at the National Office, and 59 field staff across New Zealand (see Appendix 1 for an organisation chart). For major events, the Commission grows considerably; more than 25,000 temporary staff were employed to deliver the 2020 General Election and referendums.

Performance framework

The Commission is accountable for its performance to the Minister of Justice and is monitored on behalf of the Minister by the Ministry of Justice.

A health democracy, trust and confidence in the electoral system, and high voter participation are central to the Commission's performance framework shown in Figure 1. This framework guides our service performance measures and our reporting to you. The Commission will review the framework as it reflects on the lessons learned from the 2020 General Election and will consult with you on any proposed changes.

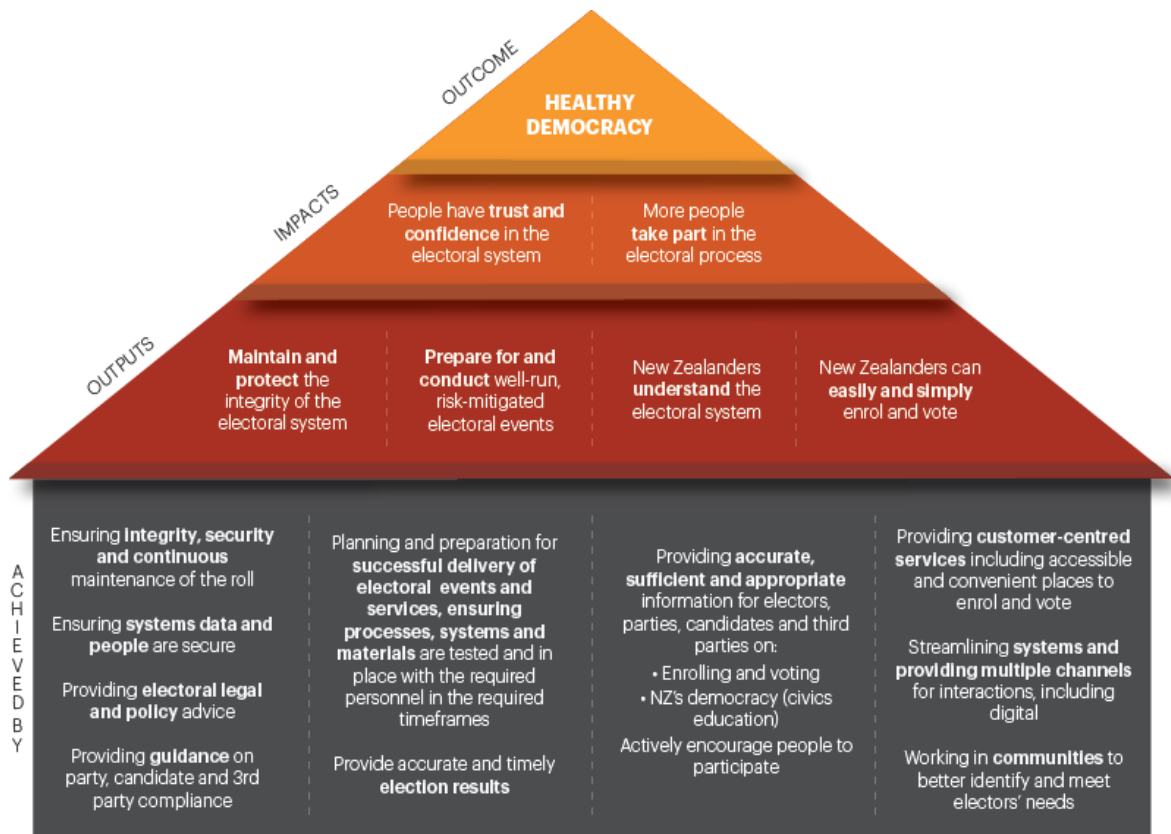


Figure 1. Electoral Commission performance framework

2020 General Election highlights

Number of voters



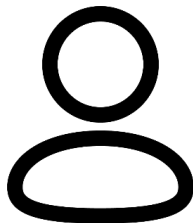
About 2,919,000 votes cast

Turnout



82.2 percent turnout of enrolled electors, highest since 1999

Logistics



25,000 temporary staff
1,522 advance voting places
2,567 election day voting places

Enrolment



3.55 million enrolled, 94.1 percent of eligible voters
Māori enrolment up 12.3% from 2017

Advance voting



68% of votes issued in advance

Overseas



62,787 votes cast from overseas

PART TWO – OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

This section outlines opportunities and challenges for the Electoral Commission following the successful delivery of the 2020 General Election and the End of Life Choice and Cannabis referendums. The Commission is required to report by May 2021 to you and Parliament on the delivery of the 2020 General Election.

We will respond to and advise on legislative change

We understand you intend to work with political parties from across Parliament on issues that affect our democracy, including the Commission's 2012 recommended changes to MMP, electoral finance law, and the length of the parliamentary term. Depending on which electoral reforms are agreed and when, any consequential changes to election processes would need to be implemented by the Commission and factored into its strategy and plans for future electoral cycles.

As has occurred following previous elections, the Commission's Report on the 2020 General Election is expected to make recommendations about legislative changes to support increased effectiveness and efficiency of future election operations.

Ideally legislative changes would be made as soon as possible in an election cycle, not only to pass amendments through the House, but to allow time to incorporate the changes into preparations for the election, and to communicate the changes to the public, parties and candidates.

Achieving a high voter turnout requires investment

High enrolment and voter turnout rates are key indicators of a healthy democracy. Although the 82.2 percent turnout of enrolled voters in the 2020 General Election was the highest since 1999, it was lower than turnouts seen in the 1990s (see Figure 3 on page 16). To sustain high turnouts in an increasingly diverse New Zealand society, investment is required in an increasing range of approaches that promote and support voter participation.

The Commission promotes high voter participation via enrolment update campaigns, grass-roots engagement particularly with Māori, Pacific Peoples and deprived communities, civics education in schools, motivational communications campaigns, and having voting places located close to where people live, work and congregate. In the 2020 General Election, the Commission also took its focus on making voting places easily accessible to voters to a new level with more voting places being available for longer hours compared to 2017.

To maintain high turnout rates, investment is also required given population growth and cost pressures particularly in relation to people, property, and postage. The impact of these factors over a 3-year electoral cycle is significant. For example, the wages for temporary staff working on the 2020 election were set in a context where the Living Wage had increased 9 percent between 2017 and 2020.

Service delivery improvements will be prioritised

The Commission has worked over successive electoral cycles to adapt and improve voting and enrolment services to meet the needs of New Zealanders. The opportunity exists to further improve services in future elections for population groups, particularly Māori, Pacific Peoples, and people with disabilities, to ensure they can easily access voting and enrolment services they feel comfortable using. The Commission could, for example, further increase the number of voting places that are bilingual and/or offer NZ Sign Language services. Both these services were piloted in the 2020 General Election.

Other service delivery improvements are possible. For example, the Commission is keen to further promote digital enrolment. This has benefits for many voters, as well as for downstream election processes both from an integrity and efficiency perspective. The Commission could consolidate enrolment and special vote declaration forms into a single form to improve voter experience and help people enrol and vote earlier. The Commission would also look to provide voting services in supermarkets as it had planned to do prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commission will systematically identify, analyse and prioritise service delivery improvements as part of its post-election review. The Commission's ability to implement these improvements will depend on the organisation's capacity, available funding, and, in some instances, the Electoral Act. Some opportunities will need to be held over for consideration in elections post 2023.

Capacity, capability, and resilience needs to be strengthened

The 2020 General Election was more complex to plan and prepare for than previous elections. It included some major process changes (such as Election Day enrolment and easier digital enrolment) and involved two referendums. The Commission also significantly increased its security stance, both physical and cyber, through working very closely with the security agencies. On top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic created significant challenges for the Commission in the six months leading up to Election Day, particularly in relation to keeping election staff and the voting public safe. While the Commission was able to successfully pivot and re-plan at pace, further work needs to be done to ensure the Commission, and the wider electoral system, has sufficient agility and flexibility to respond effectively to unforeseen events and risks.

The permanent core capacity of the Commission has traditionally contracted and then expanded sharply between three-yearly elections. However, to run successful general elections and by-elections with less risk in an increasingly complex environment and better meet voter needs, the Commission is likely to require a higher level of permanent core staff capacity and capability with less pronounced peaks. Reasons for this include:

- Preparations for the next election, including the securing of funding, need to start before the current election is completed, to ensure there is enough time for effective election planning, appropriately paced development, and cost-effective procurement.
- To support stakeholder inputs into voting services design and high levels of voter participation, engagement with communities and key stakeholders needs to be ongoing rather than narrowly focused on the lead up to Election Day.

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- Public communications and civics education need to be more continuous to support high enrolment levels and readiness for any by-elections.

Linked to this, the Commission needs to reduce its reliance on single or small groups of individuals and the use of contractors to support core functions. The current Commission is the result of the amalgamation of functions from several organisations and it has not yet been able to fully adjust its core capacity and capability to the level required to run a major national event without significant 'key-person' risks. For example, despite the addition of new roles ahead of the 2020 General Election in areas like human resources, some Commission functions like finance, procurement and security have insufficient depth and/or permanence. The Commission must also increase the number of its subject matter experts in election operations. This will reduce the intense workload pressures this cohort experienced in the 2020 General Election and prevent it from being a resource bottleneck that impacts on the performance of other teams.

There is also a need for further investment in enabling technology and systems. While significant advances were made to the Commission's technology services in the lead up to this election including software enhancements for voter registration, substantial cyber security advances, and device and infrastructure modernisation, the Commission needs to start immediately on planning and implementing further technology improvements. IT is a key enabler for the Commission to meet its statutory obligations and needs to be adequately equipped to support the organisation's core objectives. Focus is currently being placed on updating payroll and people management systems, consolidating and modernising server infrastructure to align with Department of Internal Affairs' advice, building on cyber security measures to combat the ever-changing threat environment as well as enhancing and where appropriate replacing legacy electoral and enrolment systems ahead of any by-elections, referendums and the next election in 2023.

Certainty of funding is needed for effective election delivery

The Commission's Board would like to discuss the Commission's funding challenges with you at the earliest opportunity, including how best to approach the Cabinet report-back on the Commission's funding model, and an Election Access Fund budget bid.

A general election is a massive undertaking which has been described as NZ's largest peacetime effort. In 2020 it involved over 25,000 temporary staff at its peak to enable 3.8 million people to enrol and vote. To plan and deliver such a large event both effectively and efficiently, the Commission requires certainty around its budget and election programme scope as early as possible. The Commission needs to run an election to a strategy and design, establish appropriate structures and resourcing, and is also expected to follow good practice procurement processes. Lack of early budget certainty creates issues with all of this.

The Commission's funding for the 2023 electoral cycle totals \$136 million over three years (see Table 1 below). Excluding funding for referendums, COVID-19, and change in election date, the starting point for the 2023 electoral cycle is lower by \$39.835 million compared to the 2020 cycle, yet costs for 2023 will be higher than 2020 due to property, wage and other increases. This will create significant risk to the Commission to deliver the 2023 General

Election. Given this, a budget bid is being prepared for submission as part of Budget 2021 to secure additional funding for the 2023 electoral cycle.

| | 2020 electoral cycle – final year | 2023 electoral cycle | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------|---------|
| Appropriation (\$ million) | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
| Total appropriation | 139.973 ¹ | 24.200 | 43.145 | 68.655 |

Table 1. The Electoral Commission’s funding from appropriations

We believe the fact that the Commission needs to seek funding to run general elections through the contestable budget process is also a risk to the independence and integrity of the election process. The current funding process does not give any protection to the potential for funding decision-makers to (be seen to) limit the Commission’s budget and its ability to achieve election outcomes like voter turnout. Internationally, electoral agencies are very concerned about how their funding arrangements could impact their independence and ability to operate. A recent review by the Auditor-General for New South Wales of four integrity agencies, including the NSW Electoral Commission, concluded that the current approach to the annual funding of these agencies presented a threat to their independence.

We must establish and administer the Election Access Fund

Another immediate priority for the Commission is to secure funding to support operation and administration of an Election Access Fund. The purpose of the fund is to reduce barriers for people with disabilities to stand as election candidates.

Under the Election Access Fund Act 2020 the Electoral Commission must establish and administer this fund, which must be paid a general grant out of an appropriation by Parliament. The Minister of Justice must determine the amount of the grant. The Commission is required to consult with appropriate persons and organisations before communicating the fund’s eligibility criteria.

The Commission is working with the Ministry of Justice to scope options for the access fund and lodge a request for funding as part of Budget 2021. The budget bid will seek funding to ensure appropriate consultation occurs, and to cover the fund itself and establishment and ongoing administration costs.

¹Appropriation for 2020/21 includes significant one-off funding relating to COVID-19 funding, referendums and change in election date.

PART THREE – UPCOMING MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

Below are short descriptions of key matters that the Commission will work with you and the Ministry of Justice on over the next six months. More detail will be provided in separate briefings and meetings. Information on any other matters can be provided at your request.

1. Priorities, strategic direction and funding

The Board would value meeting with you soon to introduce themselves and the Commission's work, discuss the Government's intentions to progress electoral reforms, and any other priorities you might have for this coming term. In this context, the Board would also like to discuss the Commission's funding situation with you, including the budget bid it is preparing for submission in January 2021, and how the Cabinet report-back on the Commission's funding model might be approached.

Our proposal: Agree to meet with the Board to discuss priorities, strategic direction and funding.

2. Election Access Fund

The Commission is working with the Ministry of Justice to scope options for the Election Access Fund and request funding as part of Budget 2021. The bid will seek funding to ensure appropriate consultation occurs, and to cover the fund itself as well as establishment and ongoing administration costs. The Election Access Fund Act 2020 requires the Minister of Justice to determine the grant to be paid to the Election Access Fund.

Our proposal: Note we will ask you to agree to support submission of a budget bid in Budget 2021 for the Election Access Fund and its administration.

3. Report on the 2020 General Election

The Commission is required under s8.1 of the Electoral Act to provide a Report on the General Election to Parliament within six months of the return of the writ. The report is provided first to you and then it is tabled in Parliament within five working days. The report is also provided to the Justice Select Committee which, as a matter of convention, conducts an inquiry into the general election.

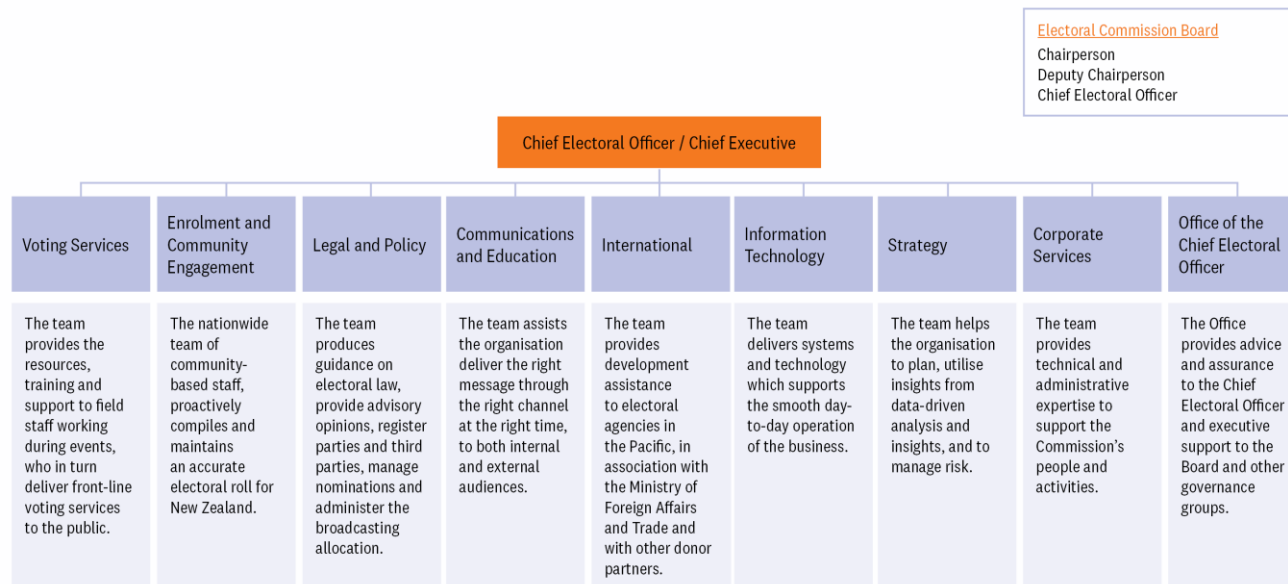
Our proposal: Note we will ask you to consider the final draft of the Commission's Report on the 2020 General Election before we provide the final report to you in May 2021 for tabling in Parliament within five working days.

4. Annual Report

The Commission's 2019/20 Annual Report must be published by 18 December 2020. The Crown Entities Act 2004 requires you as the responsible Minister to present the document to the House. We will provide the Annual Report to you in early-mid December, and the Commission and your office will coordinate with the Bills Office for the tabling process.

Our proposal: Agree to present the Annual Report to the House by no later than 18 December 2020.

APPENDIX ONE - ELECTORAL COMMISSION ORGANISATION STRUCTURE



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APPENDIX TWO – ELECTIONS

In this appendix we describe the key features of elections and provide a brief overview of the 2020 General Election.

Key features of an election

The New Zealand electoral system is designed to encourage voting, while maintaining fairness, secrecy of an individual's ballot, equity, and transparency. To enable participation, and to protect the integrity of the system, New Zealand's elections have the following features:

- Election Day is always on a Saturday
- Advance voting and overseas voting are available before Election Day
- Voters can vote at any voting place in New Zealand
- People in New Zealand can enrol right up to and including Election Day
- All voting places issue votes for General and Māori electorates
- Justices of the Peace monitor the post-election process
- A robust process takes place to identify and investigate voters who have voted more than once
- All preliminary results are counted twice to ensure accuracy of final numbers
- Parties and candidates can scrutinise the process
- Detailed, reusable data is released in multiple formats following the official count.

The 2020 General Election

The Commission's report to Parliament will provide a comprehensive account of the 2020 General Election and recommendations for the future. Below is a brief overview.

COVID-19 pandemic

The 2020 General Election and referendums were conducted during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic required the Commission to pivot and re-plan several times in the months leading up to Election Day.

The Commission received \$176 million to operate the Commission over the 3-year 2020 electoral cycle and deliver the 2020 General Election. In addition, it received \$18.2 million for the two referendums, \$28.7 million for implementation of COVID-19 contingency plans, and \$13.5 million for the change of election date from 19 September to 17 October. The total funding received by the Commission for the 2023 electoral cycle was therefore around \$230 million.

Significant communications activity was required to inform the public not only how to enrol and vote but also to advise on safety measures and the change of election date. The successive waves of communications generated a much higher level of public awareness compared to previous elections. Survey results have shown that 75 percent of respondents could recall enrolment or voting-related advertising just prior to the 2020 General Election, compared to 52 percent and 58 percent just after the 2017 and 2014 elections.

More voting places and open for longer

A key objective of the 2020 General Election strategy was to improve voting place accessibility by having more voting places available to the public to support a predicted increase in advance voting and using better locations. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the Commission had planned to have 2,550 election day voting places and 850 advance voting places. See Figure 2. With the onset of the pandemic the Commission expanded voting place capacity even further so voters could respond to ‘vote local’ safety messaging and physically distance to Alert Level 2 requirements if needed.

The resultant increase in the number of voting places between the 2020 and 2017 elections can be seen in Figure 2. The key difference is in the number of advance voting places, which increased 213 percent from 486 in 2017 to 1,522 in 2020.

Figure 2 also shows that the total hours that voting places were open (total hours of service) increased significantly between 2017 and 2020. The total hours of service in 2020 were about 85,500 hours, up from 51,800 in 2017 or a 65 percent increase. Key factors explaining the increase in service hours were differences in the length of the advance voting period (14 days in 2020 compared to 12 in 2017), and the increased number of advance voting places.

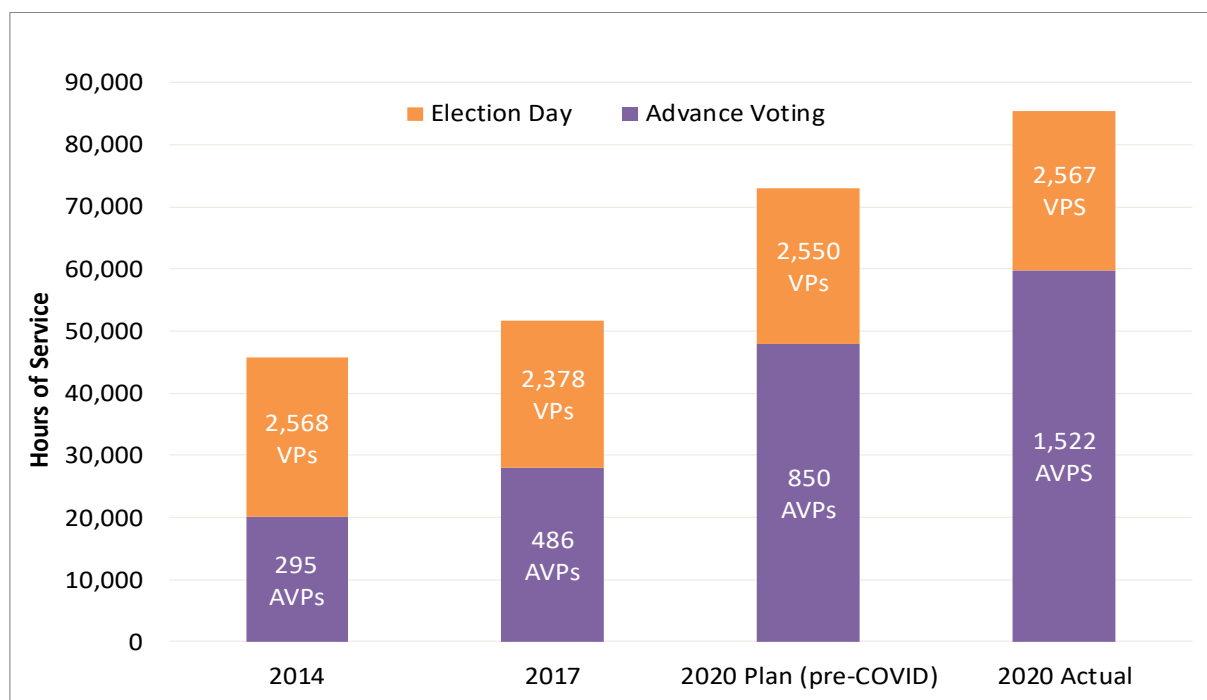


Figure 2. Number of voting places and total hours of service in recent elections

The Commission built on the approach adopted in the 2017 General Election of locating voting places close to where people live and work, with the pre-COVID-19 plan being to use highly convenient locations like supermarkets, big-box stores and shopping malls. The Commission also worked with marae, churches and mosques to provide groups of voters with voting places where they could feel comfortable. Bilingual voting places and NZ Sign Language services were piloted.

Due to the pandemic, some aspects of the plan needed to be modified. Appropriate physical distancing between voters and voting staff would have been too difficult to achieve in some locations, particularly in supermarkets. Replacement voting places were found with a continued emphasis on voter convenience.

Effective community engagement

The Commission's community engagement team was expanded significantly to support the 2020 General Election and included 28 youth advocates, 20 community engagement advisors and 170 community liaisons supported by ten contracted organisations. The team fosters relationships with communities to build trust and confidence in the electoral process, with priority given to Māori, Youth, Pasifica, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities.

The Commission's community engagement efforts are monitored through independent research. A recent report concluded that all community engagement targets set for the 2020 General Election were exceeded. The targets related to awareness of online enrolment and the referendums, perceived ease of enrolling, understanding of the voting process, feelings of involvement, and intention to vote.

High turnout and enrolment rates

The 2020 General Election saw the highest turnout of voters since 1999. More than 2.9 million people, or 82.2 percent of enrolled voters, voted. This compares with a 79.8 percent turnout in 2017. Turnout in the Māori electorates was 69.1 percent, the highest since 1999.

There was a large increase in the number of young people voting. The number of voters aged 18-24 years increased 18.8 percent between the 2017 and 2020 elections, compared to an 11.1 percent increase across all age groups. The number of voters of Māori descent increased 15.1 percent between 2017 and 2020, compared to a 10.5 percent increase for Non-Māori.

About 3.55 million electors were enrolled to vote in the 2020 General Election. This equates to an overall enrolment rate of 94.1 percent, the highest rate since 2008. The youth enrolment rate rose to 80.7 percent, the highest since 2011. The number of Māori enrolled increased 12.3 percent between 2017 and 2020, compared to a 6.8 percent increase for Non-Māori.

Figure 3 shows the trend in enrolment and turnout rates for general elections since 1990. Voter turnout at all New Zealand elections since 2002 has been lower than it was through the 1990s, while the reverse pattern is seen with the enrolment rate.

The total number of votes cast in the 2020 General Election was about 2,919,000 – of those 68 percent were cast in advance. Figure 4 shows the trend towards greater advance voting over recent elections.

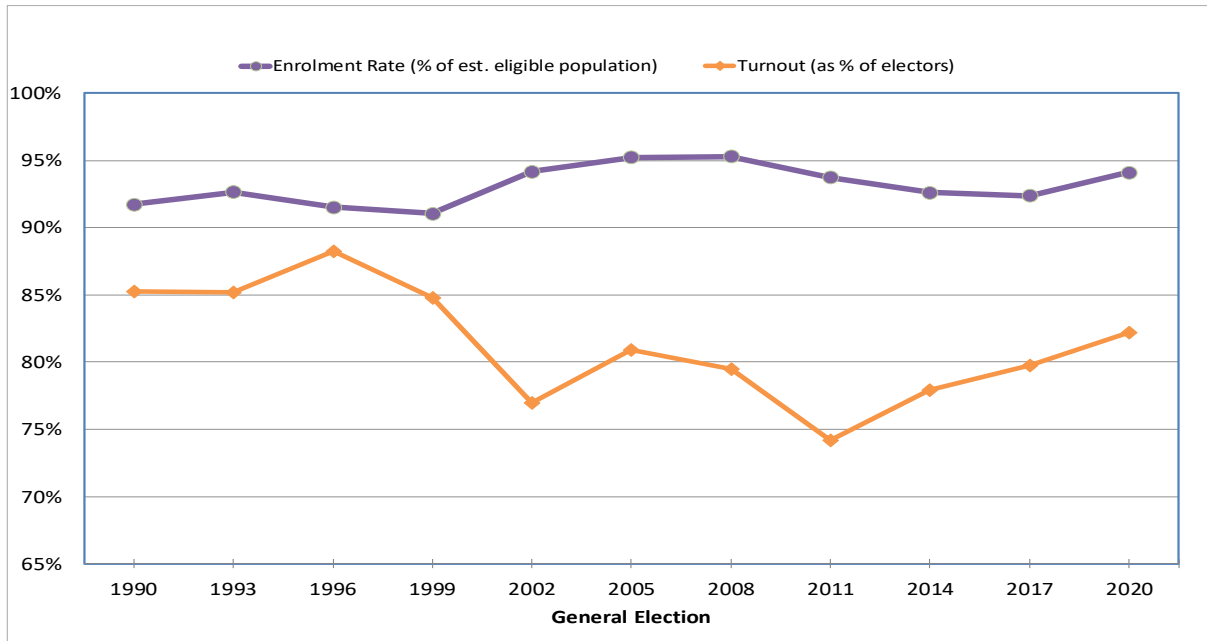


Figure 3. Voter enrolment and turnout rates, 1990 to 2020 General Elections

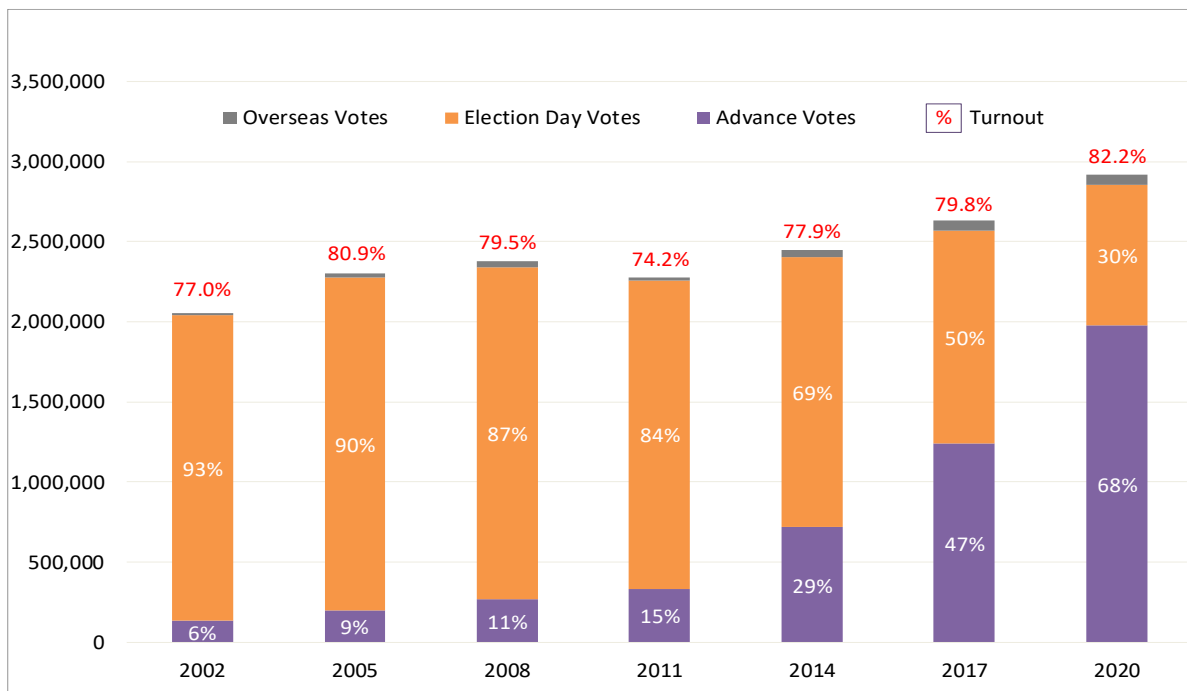


Figure 4. Turnout and total votes cast, 2002 to 2020 General Elections

Growth in digital enrolment

Figure 5 shows that 58 percent of enrolment transactions (new enrolments and changes to enrolment details) in the four-month period leading up to the 2020 General Election, were digital rather than paper, up from 8 percent in 2017. The overall number of transactions also increased significantly compared to 2017, reflecting a greater number of people enrolling or updating their details just before the election.

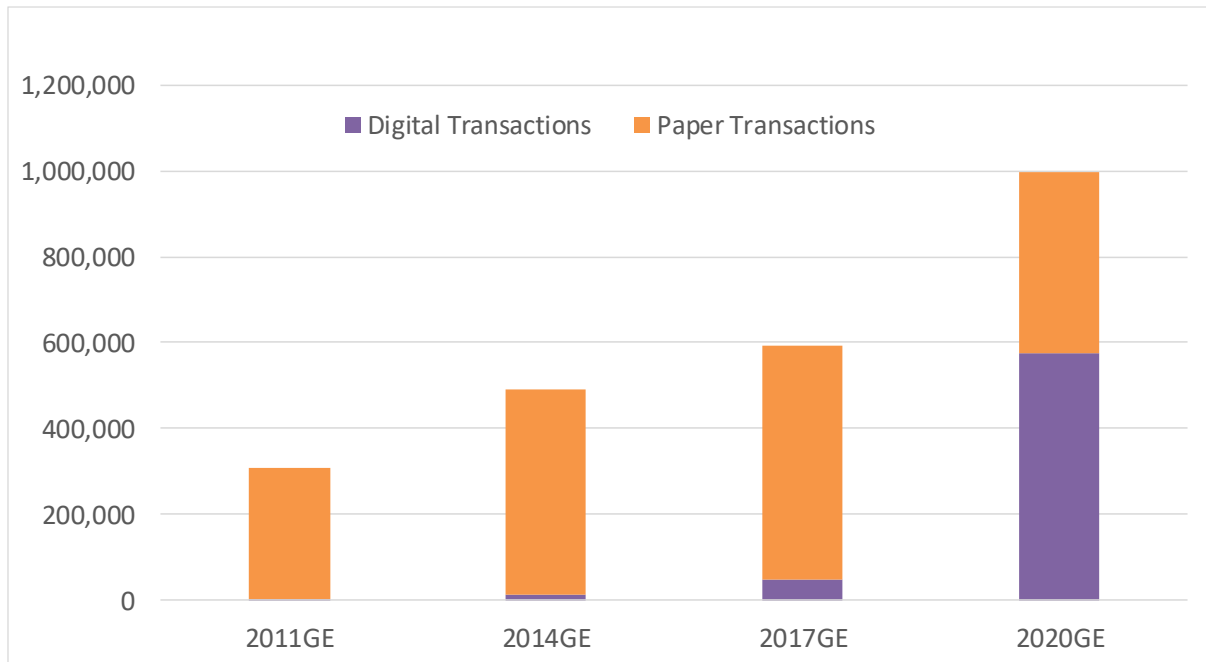


Figure 5. Digital and paper enrolment transactions processed in the four-month period up to Election Day, 2011 to 2020 General Elections

Special votes

The number of special votes cast was 504,625 this election or 17 percent of total votes, and the same percentage as in the 2017 election. This included 62,787 overseas votes.

A key feature of this election was the ability to enrol and vote on Election Day. About 80,000 voters did so. Election day enrolment led to a halving of the number of disallowed votes compared to 2017. See Figure 6.

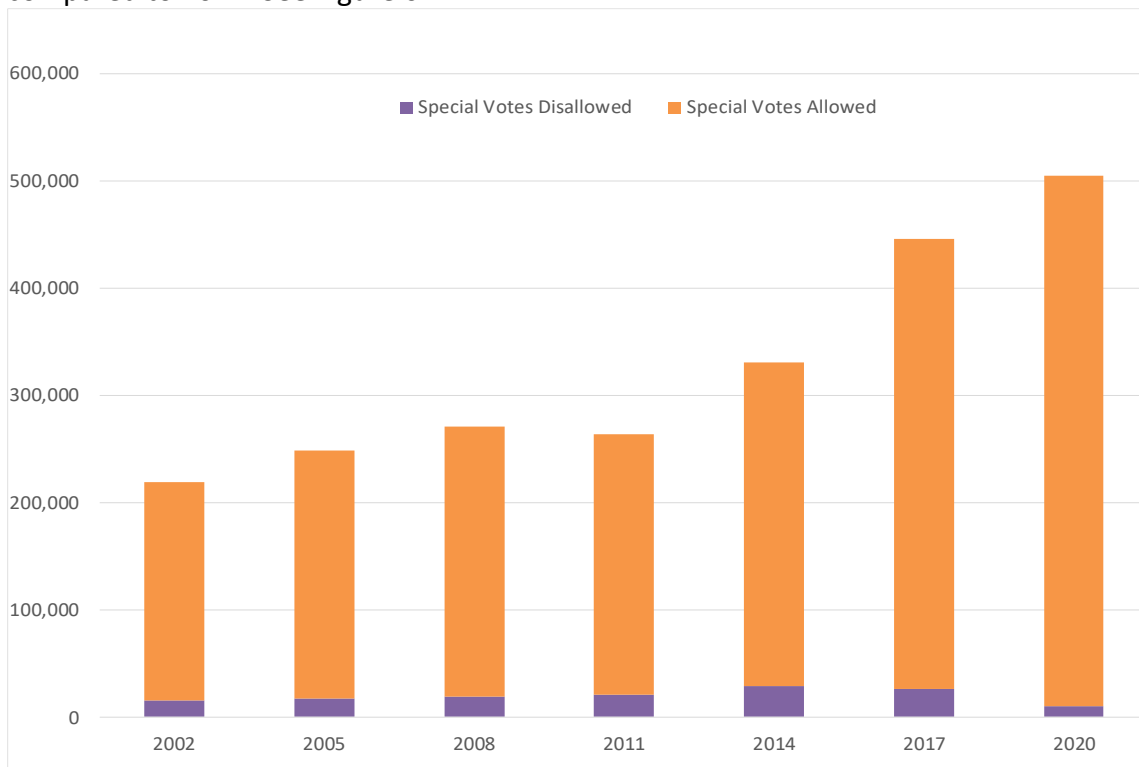


Figure 6. Special votes allowed and disallowed, 2002 to 2020 General Elections

APPENDIX THREE – ELECTORAL COMMISSION GOVERNANCE AND FUNCTIONS

In this appendix we introduce the Electoral Commission Board and describe the key functions of the Electoral Commission.

Electoral Commission Board

The Commission is governed by a Board of three Commissioners: the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, and the Chief Electoral Officer who is also the Commission's Chief Executive. Appointments to the Commission are made by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the House of Representatives.

Chair: Marie Shroff, MA (Hons), CVO, CNZM



Marie's five-year term as Chair of the Electoral Commission began in August 2019. She is also a member of the Media Council, and on the boards of Consumer New Zealand and the Privacy Foundation New Zealand.

Marie was Privacy Commissioner from 2003 to 2014. Between 1987 and 2003 Marie was Secretary of the Cabinet and Clerk of the Executive Council, working with four Governors-General, and six Prime Ministers from both major parties. During that time, she co-led a senior officials group which prepared central government for the introduction of the MMP electoral system.

Deputy Chair: Jane Meares, LLB (Hons)



Jane's five-year term as Deputy Chair of the Electoral Commission began in August 2019. Jane is a barrister at Clifton Chambers in Wellington. She undertakes public sector and commercial advisory work. She was previously Treasury's chief legal adviser.

Jane is Chair and Chief Commissioner of the Transport Accident Investigation Commission, Chair of Financial Services Complaints Limited, a director of the Electricity Corporation of New Zealand, Chair of the Ballet Foundation of New Zealand and a member of Land Information New Zealand's risk and audit committee.

Chief Electoral Officer: Alicia Wright, MSc



Alicia Wright's five-year term as Chief Electoral Officer and Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission began in January 2017. Prior to joining the Commission, Alicia was Deputy Secretary Evaluation at the Ministry of Defence, having held that role since 2012.

Alicia has been a public servant both in New Zealand and overseas. She has also been a principal at Deloitte and was Director of Amherst Group. She has held a number of senior roles across the public service including with the Ministry of Social Development, Department of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Defence.

Electoral Commission functions

Enrolment for elections

The Commission has 17 regional offices staffed by Registrars of Electors and deputies who are responsible for the compilation and maintenance of electoral rolls for parliamentary and local authority elections.

New Zealand has a continuous enrolment system that provides for ongoing daily maintenance of the rolls as people enrol, move and update their details. The rolls always need to be in a state of readiness for any electoral event. Enrolment update campaigns are conducted prior to parliamentary and local authority elections to give electors the opportunity to enrol or update their details for those elections.

It is compulsory for all qualified people in New Zealand to be on the Electoral Roll. Qualified means:

- 18 years or older
- New Zealand citizen or permanent resident
- Lived in New Zealand for one year or more without leaving the country.

Engagement with the community

The Commission's data and research identifies where enrolment and turnout are low, the groups that are less likely to vote, and the reasons why they are not enrolling and voting. We also identify groups that are not accessing mainstream media and advertising about enrolling and voting. This data informs our strategies and our targeted engagement in enrolment, education, and voting services.

The Commission's ongoing community engagement programme plays a key part in reaching less engaged audiences including youth, Māori, Pacific Peoples, and new migrants. We create long-term relationships within these communities and work through the people they trust. This approach grows knowledge of how our democracy works, minimises misinformation and builds confidence.

Provision of voting services

The Commission is responsible for ensuring all systems and processes are in place for the smooth running of elections. Its voting services include:

- recruitment and training of returning officers and voting place staff
- logistical planning for the provision and return of voting supplies
- finding voting place locations that meet the needs of different communities
- oversight of voting during the advance voting period and on Election Day
- conducting the preliminary and official count of votes, and
- the release of the results.

Guidance for parties and candidates

The Commission provides advice and guidance to political parties, candidates and third parties during electoral events so that they can comply with their obligations under electoral legislation. This includes advice on election campaigning, expenditure and donations rules, the registration of parties and compliance reporting. The Commission will investigate

complaints, including from members of the public, about potential breaches of the Electoral Act and refer matters to the police if necessary.

Parties have ongoing compliance obligations throughout the parliamentary term, to report donations and continue to satisfy the statutory requirements to be registered. Annual audited returns are received from party secretaries and published on the www.elections.nz website. Party secretaries must also complete an annual statutory declaration relating to the number of members of the party.

In election year we also provide a range of briefings for party secretaries, third parties, media, Members of Parliament and candidates.

Party registration

The Commission is responsible for the registration of political parties and their logos in accordance with the requirements of Part 4 of the Electoral Act 1993.

Broadcasting allocation

The Commission administers allocation of a broadcasting fund. The amount available is determined by Parliament. Prior to each general election, registered parties or parties that intend to register before the election can apply for funding.

Public information and education

The Commission undertakes extensive public education campaigns to raise awareness of upcoming electoral events and encourage participation, including advertising campaigns. The Commission has developed curriculum aligned civics teaching units for use in schools and regularly visits schools to encourage enrolment.

In general election years, schools are invited to take part in the Kids Voting programme and run their own mock elections so students can learn first-hand about New Zealand's electoral system. In 2020, 1034 schools held Kids Voting mock elections involving approximately 140,000 students.

Local authority elections

Local authority elections are conducted by territorial authorities under the provisions of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the Local Electoral Regulations 2001 and the Local Government Act 2002. The Commission, however, does provide some support to local authority elections. Specifically, the Commission:

- Provides electoral rolls to all local councils for the elections
- Conducts an Enrolment Update Campaign conducted prior to the election period to ensure these rolls are up to date, and
- Produces a public information and education strategy to support this campaign and local bodies.

Local authority elections are held on the second Saturday in October every three years. The next local authority elections are due in 2022.

Māori Electoral Option

The Commission runs the Māori Electoral Option once every five years, following every New Zealand census, to provide electors of Māori descent the opportunity to change roll type. The last was held in 2018, however as they cannot occur in an election year the next option will be in 2024.

The Commission's role is to make sure Māori electors have the information they need to facilitate their choice about which roll they intend to be registered on and then to implement any changes into the roll system.

When people of Māori descent first enrol they have the option to register on the Māori roll or the general roll. They are only able to change roll type subsequently through the 'Māori Electoral Option'.

Referendums

The Electoral Commission is responsible for the operational delivery of parliamentary referendums, which includes the maintenance of the rolls of eligible electors and administration of the vote. Referendums may be government-initiated or citizens-initiated. Since 1993 there have been ten referendums – seven were government-initiated and three were citizens-initiated.

Representation Commission

The Electoral Commission, together with Stats NZ and Land Information New Zealand, is responsible for supporting the Representation Commission. This is an independent statutory body that reviews and redraws parliamentary electorate boundaries. It comprises an independent chair and members representing the Government and the Opposition. Senior officials from Stats NZ, Land Information New Zealand, the Electoral Commission, the Local Government Commission and Te Puni Kōkiri sit on the Commission as ex officio members.

The process for determining new electoral boundaries is set out in the Electoral Act, including when the boundaries are reviewed (after each five-yearly population census and Māori Electoral Option) and the public consultation process. The Act also sets out the criteria that the Representation Commission must consider when redrawing the boundaries, including electorates having approximately equal population sizes and reflecting communities of interest.

The next Representation Commission is scheduled to commence following the 2023 Census and the Māori Electoral Option.

Election Access Fund

Coming into force on 1 July 2021, the Election Access Fund Act 2020 requires the Electoral Commission to establish and administer a fund to facilitate the participation of disabled persons standing as candidates in, or seeking selection as candidates in, general elections or by-elections.

International engagement

The Commission participates in networks with electoral management bodies from other democracies with similar electoral systems, leveraging opportunities for sharing electoral

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expertise and investigating enhanced techniques for conducting electoral events. These include an exclusive network with Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, and another between the federal and state electoral commissions of Australia and New Zealand. The Commission is also a member of a regional network of Pacific national election management bodies.

The Commission hosts a range of visiting delegations and study tours, in association with MFAT and/or Parliamentary Services, and provides election-related briefings for the Diplomatic Corps based in New Zealand and pre-departure briefings for New Zealand Diplomats posting overseas.

In partnership with MFAT, the Commission provides electoral assistance programmes to Pacific electoral management bodies. Current programmes are in Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, Fiji, and Tonga, with the most recent significant contribution to the successful conduct of the recent Bougainville referendum on independence. The electoral assistance programmes are funded under the New Zealand Aid Programme. Additionally, on request and with MFAT approval and funding, the Commission provides ad hoc support for other Pacific elections – for example, the provision of essential election supplies.