

21/11/2023

By email to: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

### **OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST 2023/85**

On Friday, 20 October 2023 you made a request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA) for the following information:

- *Why did stations run out of voting ballots for special votes?*
- *Why was there seemingly only one person allocated at each voting station for the special votes? The most time consuming job on the day yet three scrutineers for the registered votes. Do these numbers reflect the same for every voting station in New Zealand?*
- *Why were people in Christchurch, told “no special vote allocation for New Zealand Loyal”?*
- *Do you agree it is unacceptable that a Christchurch voting station, lost 22 special voters within the time one man was present to witness this happening, due to the 40 minute wait and only one person available to process special votes? Do you agree it is highly unprofessional conduct of a woman volunteering for the EC, to giggle and say nothing when he said to her “hey you're losing voters”?*
- *Why did the public, observe nonchalant attitudes of EC volunteers at voting stations right across New Zealand? I know good reliable people declined from being scrutineers because they weren't the right ethnicity, gender or because they were involved in a freedom group of some sort.*
- *Why was the voting process so confusional for many? My own experience was having to ask “where do I go?” “What’s next?” “Now what?” What level of training was given to volunteers and how were they selected?*
- *What processes do you have in place to prevent election fraud? Are votes counted with camera surveillance to ensure honesty and a clean election?*
- *Why was black tape covering numbers on voting ballots?*
- *Are you Sean, or anyone else you know at the Election Commission, guilty of any crimes associated with election fraud and deliberate attempts to sabotage the election process?*
- *How many freemasons are employed by and have direct involvement with the Electoral Commission?*

1. *Why did stations run out of voting ballots for special votes?*

Voting places were well stocked with voting papers, were monitored continuously, and restocked when needed. Mobile teams were available to resupply in areas where we experienced higher than anticipated demand. We are aware of a small number of instances of voting places temporarily running out of special voting papers. The electoral legislation anticipates that this can occur and provides a process to enable voting to continue. The Electoral Commission has detailed processes for staff to follow where this happens so that voters can continue to vote.

We're not aware of anyone being turned away or leaving because of queues. As outlined below, sometimes our staff will suggest nearby voting places where wait times are shorter – but that's not turning people away, we want people to vote.

2. *Why was there seemingly only one person allocated at each voting station for the special votes? The most time consuming job on the day yet three scrutineers for the registered votes. Do these numbers reflect the same for every voting station in New Zealand?*

Our understanding of your question is about issuing officers, not scrutineers. Specifically, where issuing officers were allocated to issue special votes.

The Commission employs staff who are appointed as electoral officials to issue votes. All voting places undergo an assessment to determine the number of staff to be allocated to a specific voting place. Each voting place has a different layout, accessibility needs, security profiles, size, abilities to manage queues, places to store equipment and materials, access, parking, and other relevant factors. These factors assist in determining the number of staff required at a voting place. Voting Place Managers aim to have an optimum number of staff at each voting place to support voters and are recruited locally from their communities. The voting place that you attended will have undergone the same assessment as every other voting place in the country.

Scrutineers at a voting place are appointed by electorate candidates contesting the electorate (or a party secretary of a party contesting the party vote if the party does not have a candidate contesting the electorate). The number of scrutineers present at voting places can vary and is not connected to the issuing of votes by Commission staff.

3. *Why were people in Christchurch, told “no special vote allocation for New Zealand Loyal”?*

The Commission provided special voting in all Christchurch electorates.

New Zealand Loyal was listed in the party vote section on all ordinary and special ballot papers.

Two candidates for New Zealand Loyal stood in electorates in the Christchurch region for the 2023 General Election: Christine van Duivenboden in Wigram, and Logan Courtenay in Selwyn. For voters enrolled in the Wigram and Selwyn electorates, a New Zealand Loyal candidate appeared on their ballot papers in the candidate vote section on both ordinary votes and special votes. For voters enrolled in other electorates in the Christchurch region, no New Zealand Loyal candidate appeared in the candidate vote section of the ordinary and special ballot paper at the election.

4. *Do you agree it is unacceptable that a Christchurch voting station, lost 22 special voters within the time one man was present to witness this happening, due to the 40 minute wait and only one person available to process special votes? Do you agree it is highly unprofessional conduct of a woman volunteering for the EC, to giggle and say nothing when he said to her “hey you're losing voters”?*

There were queues at some voting places due to high demand, however, the Electoral Commission is not aware of the specific matter that you are raising. The following steps were taken to help manage queues:

- If queues formed at a voting place during the advanced voting period, more staff were allocated to the voting place during the advanced voting period, and on election day,
- voters with an EasyVote card were able to go directly to an issuing officer and voters who did not have an EasyVote card were assessed by a voting assistant,
- Where there were queues, voters were also advised of nearby voting places if they preferred to vote elsewhere.

All staff employed to work at voting places are paid and employed by the Electoral Commission. They are not volunteers. During the election period, we have over 15,000 people working in our voting places. They all receive training. We want everyone to have a good experience when they go to vote, and if that doesn't happen, we want to hear about it. Any voter that has concerns about their experience at a voting place, can send an email including as much detail as possible to [enquiries@elections.govt.nz](mailto:enquiries@elections.govt.nz). Telling the Commission when and where they voted will help us investigate and resolve any issues that have been raised.

5. *Why did the public, observe nonchalant attitudes of EC volunteers at voting stations right across New Zealand? I know good reliable people declined from being scrutineers because they weren't the right ethnicity, gender or because they were involved in a freedom group of some sort.*

The Commission is committed to providing every voter with an excellent voting service.

As explained in the response to question 4, the Commission employs staff to work in voting places and does not use volunteers.

As explained in the response to question 2, scrutineers are not appointed by the Commission.

It's important the people working to deliver the election are from their local community. We also set clear expectations that they must work in a way that supports a free and fair election. We have a code of conduct that sets that out, including being politically neutral, and that's what people sign up to. If people can meet these requirements, they are welcome to apply to work with us.

We treat all applicants as individuals when we look at whether they can work with us. We expect anyone with an affiliation to a political party or political cause to declare it when they apply for a job. It doesn't necessarily mean they wouldn't get a job, but we would need strong assurance that they could meet our requirements for neutrality.

We recognise that people who work in voting places have diverse backgrounds. They will have their own views and opinions, but the important thing is that people leave that at the door when they work with us. They must be impartial in their work and follow our processes and code of conduct.

There are checks in place for all election jobs. The process starts with a written application for the role, which includes questions on whether applicants have political affiliations to declare. They are also asked if they have any criminal convictions, or if there are any charges or investigations pending. The recruitment process also includes:

- An interview process,
- Referee checks,
- People offered roles also undergo a Ministry of Justice check for criminal convictions and a serious misconduct check, where an applicant has had previous employment with other government agencies/crown entities in the last three years.

6. *Why was the voting process so confusional for many? My own experience was having to ask “where do I go?” “What’s next?” “Now what?” What level of training was given to volunteers and how were they selected?*

We endeavour to provide a positive experience to voters, and we work to continuously improve our processes. We appreciate your feedback.

As above, all voting place staff are paid and employed by the Electoral Commission. They are not volunteers. As outlined above, all staff recruited by the Commission undergo a rigorous recruitment process. Following this process, successful applicants are required to undergo training. Training sessions take place in-house, in the form of group training, and individual online training. Voting place staff are also provided with a relevant instruction manual.

After each training, the Rostering Manager and Electorate Manager will assess each individual’s performance against the Commission’s expectations. Further support will be provided depending on each individual’s needs.

7. *What processes do you have in place to prevent election fraud? Are votes counted with camera surveillance to ensure honesty and a clean election?*

The Commission is required to conduct elections in accordance with the Electoral Act 1993, which contains a number of provisions to ensure the integrity of the voting process.

In accordance with the Electoral Act 1993, ordinary votes in a general election are counted twice. Ordinary votes cast in advance, and on election day, are counted and the results are released on election night. These are the preliminary results.

Once the preliminary count has been completed, electoral officials conduct the scrutiny of the rolls, which includes creating a master roll for each electorate listing the names of all people who voted.

The official count takes place after the preliminary count. All ordinary votes are counted a second time, and special votes are checked and counted, at the electorate HQ. Scrutineers appointed by candidates can be present and a Justice of the Peace is present during the official count. You can read more about the counting process on our website:

<https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/about-elections/how-are-general-election-votes-counted/>

We check the master roll to identify voters who may have voted more than once. If someone has voted more than once, their vote is not included in the official count. The master roll becomes available for public inspection after the return of the writ. Those who are identified as voting more than once are referred to the Police.

We also check every special vote to make sure each person is eligible to vote and has completed a valid special vote declaration. If a special voter is not eligible to vote or has not completed a valid declaration their special vote is not included in the official count.

These checks ensure the accuracy of the official count. More information can be found on our website: <https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/about-elections/election-integrity/>

Surveillance cameras are not used by the Commission during the counting process.

*8. Why was black tape covering numbers on voting ballots?*

The Electoral Act provides for a secret ballot at an election and contains a number of provisions designed to protect that secrecy. The Electoral Act requires that a unique consecutive number be printed on each ballot paper. Where the number can be read without the aid of technology, a black sticker is placed over the consecutive number on the ballot paper to conceal that number.

The consecutive number on the ballot paper allows electoral officials to identify and extract the votes for voters whose name has been removed from the roll because they are not eligible to vote in that electorate, and voters who appear to have voted more than once or as somebody else.

The sticker covering the consecutive number is otherwise not removed.

*9. Are you Sean, or anyone else you know at the Election Commission, guilty of any crimes associated with election fraud and deliberate attempts to sabotage the election process?*

All Electoral Commission employees are subject to a Criminal Record Check. No person is permitted to work for the Electoral Commission if they have been found guilty of an offence under the Electoral Act 1993.

*10. How many freemasons are employed by and have direct involvement with the Electoral Commission?*

Staff applying to work for the Electoral Commission are asked about their affiliations with political parties. Beyond this, the Commission does not collect personal information from staff joining external clubs, societies, or other professional bodies. This aspect of your request is

therefore refused under section 18(g) of the Act, on the basis that the information requested is not held by the Commission.

In the interests of transparency, we release responses to Official Information Act requests every 3 months. We will publish this response with your personal details redacted.

You have the right under section 28(3) of the Act to make a complaint to the Ombudsman if you are not satisfied with the response to your request. Information about how to do this is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or by phoning 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Martin Rodgers  
Director, Voting Services