

Mr Brendan Smyth MLA
Chair
Select Committee on Estimates 2014-15
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Smyth

**Questions on notice put to the ACT Electoral Commission in relation to
the Select Committee on Estimates 2014-15**

I refer to the questions on notice asked of the ACT Electoral Commission on
12 June 2014.

Answers to the questions on notice are attached.

Yours sincerely



Phillip Green
Electoral Commissioner

19 June 2014

Questions on notice put to the ACT Electoral Commission in relation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2014-15

1. Provide comments on the suggestion that the Assembly amend the Electoral Act to commence the redistribution process earlier with a view to concluding the process by Christmas 2014

Section 37 of the *Electoral Act 1992* provides:

37 Timing of redistributions

- (1) After each ordinary election, a redistribution process shall, subject to section 38—
 - (a) begin as soon as practicable after the beginning of the period of 2 years ending on the end of the 3rd Saturday in October in the year when the next ordinary election is due to be held; and
 - (b) be completed as soon as practicable.
- (2) For subsection (1), a redistribution process—
 - (a) begins when a redistribution committee is formed for the purposes of a redistribution; and
 - (b) ends when the redistribution of electorates is determined under section 35.

The practical effect of this provision is that the next redistribution, in anticipation of the 15 October 2016 ACT Legislative Assembly election, is scheduled to commence after 15 October 2014.

At the Estimates Committee hearing on 12 June 2014 Mr Hanson asked whether the redistribution could be concluded by Christmas 2014 if the Assembly was to amend the Electoral Act to allow the Electoral Commission to start the redistribution process earlier.

The earliest such an amendment could be made to the Electoral Act would be the August 2014 sittings.

It would not be possible to conclude the entire redistribution process by Christmas 2014 if the Electoral Act is amended in August 2014 to bring the start date for the redistribution forward. The various statutory deadlines set out in the Electoral Act necessitate a process that typically takes 7 to 9 months to complete.

Under the current timetable set out in the Electoral Act, the Electoral Commission is intending to appoint the Redistribution Committee in late October or early November 2014. This would enable the Redistribution Committee, if it decides to do so, to call for suggestions and comments in early November 2014. As this is a statutory 6-week period, it would mean that the suggestions and comments phases of the redistribution could be concluded before the start of the 2014-15 summer holiday period.

However, it is noted that the decision on when to call for public suggestions and comments is a decision for the Redistribution Committee, which cannot be formed until after it is established by the Electoral Commission.

As discussed at the Estimates Committee hearing, the Electoral Commission must work with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to prepare projected enrolment statistics for ACT suburbs as at October 2016. These statistics are used to meet the requirement that electorates must be within +/-5% of the quota at the time of the next election. The call for public comments cannot be made until after these statistics have been provided and the Redistribution Committee has decided to accept them.

ABS has advised that it will not be able to provide these projections by the end of August 2014. My office has been in discussion with ABS with a view to receiving the projections by the end of October 2014 in order to meet the anticipated timetable whereby suggestions would be called in early November. As a result, even if the Assembly was to amend the Electoral Act to enable the Electoral Commission to appoint the Redistribution Committee earlier, this would make no practical difference to the anticipated timetable.

If the ABS projections are available and the Redistribution Committee agrees to call submissions in early November 2014, the Electoral Commission estimates that the complete redistribution process is likely to be completed by June or July 2015 (depending on whether a second round of objections is required). If the Redistribution Committee decides to call for public suggestions in February 2015, after the end of the summer holiday period, the Commission estimates that the process will be complete by August or September 2015 at the latest. This latter timetable would be consistent with recent redistribution timetables.

2. Provide an estimate of the cost of the redistribution of electoral boundaries

My office estimates that the cost of the 2014-15 redistribution of electoral boundaries will be in the order of \$41,000. This cost includes population projections to be prepared by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, advertising, printing, postage, venue hire, photocopying and other supplies and services.

As discussed at the Estimates Committee hearing on 12 June 2014, my office is investigating whether it can provide an online mapping application to assist those making submissions to the Redistribution Committee to prepare maps of proposed boundaries. The cost of this application has not yet been determined.