



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2023-2024

Mr Mark Parton MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Mr Braddock MLA: To ask the Electoral Commissioner

ACT Electoral Commission

Hearing Date: 25 July 2023

In relation to: Audits of electronic vote records against paper ballots

The Commission has previously expressed a position of not wishing to conduct of audits of electronic vote records against the paper ballots from which they are digitized.

The Australian Electoral Commission conducted an audit after recent legislative changes at a Commonwealth level, and measured error rates in the range of 0.2% to 0.8% for the Senate vote digitisation process.

Has the Commission conducted any equivalent measurement for ballots cast on paper and then digitized, as an audit or otherwise? If so, what error rates did you observe?

Damian Cantwell AM CSC : The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

The MLA's statement of the ACT Electoral Commission's position is not accurate. Elections ACT has undertaken an audit of the digitally captured vote preferences of electronically scanned handwritten ballot papers after every election since the introduction of ballot paper scanning at the 2008 ACT election.

After each electoral event, Election ACT's Election Management System randomly selects 3,000 ballot papers from across the ACT's electorates. Elections ACT staff examine each of the digitally recorded preferences against the associated ballot paper image.

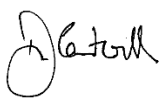
Following the 2008 election, the inaugural ballot paper scanning audit found one case only of an incorrect interpretation of preferences that was the result of the system itself. This case involved a ballot paper that was scanned with the bottom left corner of the paper folded up, covering the critical Robson Rotation number. The image of the folded corner appeared as a mark that was interpreted as a figure 1, and the system took the paper to be Robson Rotation version 1, which was incorrect. Consequently, prior to the 2012 election, the vendor was contracted to enhance the system to eliminate the specific issue identified from being repeated. A very small number of other incorrect preference interpretations that were the result of operator error were discovered during the 2008 audit.

Using the experience of the 2008 election, changes were made to operational procedures around the scanning system to address the issues found. Since that time 9,000 ballot papers across three electoral events (2012, 2016 and 2020) have been randomly selected for audit review. No incorrect preference interpretations have been identified since the 2008 election.

While it is possible that errors may have occurred on individual ballot papers not selected for review across these recent electoral events, the fact that across the combined 9,000 reviewed ballot papers not a single error has been identified indicates that the ballot paper scanning system provides for a very high level of counting accuracy.

For the 2024 ACT election, Elections ACT will further improve transparency and integrity by engaging an independent third party to conduct the ballot paper scanning assurance process during the live scrutiny of votes in the week following election day. This will allow for party scrutineers to view the process prior to the conclusion of the count. Work is currently underway to finalise this ballot paper scanning assurance process.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2023-2024

Signature: 

Date: Amended response supplied 15 August 2023

By the ACT Electoral Commissioner, Damian Cantwell AM CSC