

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF THE 2017 STATE GENERAL ELECTION**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 16 AUGUST 2017**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis (Chairman)
Mr M.J. Folkard (Deputy Chairman)
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr A. Krsticevic
Mr D.T. Punch**

Hearing commenced at 9.14 am

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL

Campaign Director, Nationals WA, examined:

Mr JAMES HAYWARD

State President, Nationals WA, examined:

Mr SIMON GLOSSOP

State Director, Nationals WA, examined:

Mr LACHLAN STEPHEN HUNTER

Former Young Nationals President, Nationals WA, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to provide evidence in relation to the inquiry into the administration and management of the 2017 state general election. As the inquiry title suggests, we are interested in how the Western Australian Electoral Commission managed and administered the 2017 election. We are not considering matters such as the voting systems or electoral boundary redistribution, which are legislative matters and therefore out of the commission's control. My name is Peter Katsambanis and I am the chair of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. I would like to introduce you to the other members of the committee. The deputy chair is Mark Folkard, member for Burns Beach; we have Zak Kirkup, member for Dawesville; Don Punch, member for Bunbury; and Tony Krsticevic, member for Carine. It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege; however, this privilege does not apply to anything you might say outside today's proceedings.

Before we begin with our questions and discussion, do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

The WITNESSES: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have an opening statement that you would like to provide?

Mr GLOSSOP: Yes, I will do that. The Nationals WA have enjoyed a good relationship with the Western Australian Electoral Commission and fully supports the work that they perform. What has become apparent during and in the aftermath of this year's state election is that the commission is drastically under-resourced when an organisation such as the Chamber of Minerals and Energy can publicly state prior to the election that they are an active participant in the election process and have spent many millions on campaigning, yet not be followed up on by the commission before the deadline for reporting, or indeed to be proactively contacted prior to the election to ensure that they were aware of advertising requirements around the Electoral Act. The WAEC advised the Nationals WA that they could not investigate discrepancies or irregularities in the election process. When looking at the example of the chamber producing campaign material that breaches the Electoral Act, the WAEC being advised of this breach on polling day, the WAEC advising polling stations to remove the collateral but then this is not happening, and when there is no punishment

of the transgressor after the act, this opens the door to anyone to influence an election outcome by breaching Western Australian legislation without fear of repercussions.

The Nationals WA strongly support freedom of speech and freedom of involvement in the election process when transparency and a level playing field is involved. This relates to the future perception by the public of the electoral process. The public want transparency in the process and to know that policy is developed free of the influence of lobby or special interest groups. This particularly relates to the influence of policy development that is in the best interest of all voters. If the influence wielded by special interest groups through utilising their financial resources to promote their message or not complying with transparent reporting requirements is allowed to continue, then the public perception of the voting system will be eroded. There is existing legislation around funding in New South Wales that could be adopted in Western Australia. This would allow for transparency in the process for the public, and limit the influence of third party special interest groups in determining policy and election outcomes. The Nationals Western Australia want to support and continue to see transparency in the electoral process and the reporting requirements being followed and adhered to. This did not seem to be the case in this election and obviously, as indicated, the under-resourced nature of the Western Australian Electoral Commission. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I might start with some questioning. You spoke about material on election day. You obviously have an understanding of what happened in various electorates and we were not there, so what was the issue with material that was circulated on election day and in particular what would you suggest could be improved to make that something that does not happen again?

Mr GLOSSOP: In our correspondence with the WAEC after the reporting time frame was over, identifying that the CME had not reported on their campaign funding, there was signage that was distributed by the CME regarding the “Say no to the mining tax” that was not authorised correctly. There are obviously well-recognised conditions around the authorisation of electoral material. When the CME had stated publicly that they were in the campaigning process and in the election, the WAEC should have, or could have, been able to be in contact then to make sure that they were following all the electoral conditions. That is when that signage was identified as not compliant to the Electoral Act. The WAEC did react and stated to remove that polling material, but unfortunately that was not followed up on at polling stations.

[9.20 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Is that a resourcing issue?

Mr GLOSSOP: When you look at it in the sense that an organisation has gone out publicly prior to the election day stating that they are spending many millions of dollars—the WAEC have told us that they were unable to perform these acts; that is where the relation to us is, that they obviously needed more staff and more ability to be able to perform their electoral management role—I would have expected that an organisation that said they were campaigning would be contacted to make sure that they were compliant with the Electoral Act requirements.

The CHAIRMAN: I will ask that in a different way: did the WAEC indicate that they simply did not have the staff to do it or did they express any concern about them breaching any legal requirements if they interfered with other people’s signage?

Mr GLOSSOP: Not that I am aware. Obviously our role was following up after the last date for reporting requirements, which is where we have identified and sent through the information that we had. I suppose what I am saying is that if I was an organisation and I knew that there was another

company or a body campaigning, that it would be to reach out—no different to that they reach out to registered political parties.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Actually, on polling day those signs were identified as being not correctly authorised and were removed at the Newman polling booth. The WAEC did advise us that they sent a text message to other polling stations to remove those signs, but they were subsequently still in place at other polling stations. Obviously that was a concern to us, because as a directive, as advised to us by the WAEC, that was not followed up by their officers on polling day at the polling booth. That is a concern. As to the reasons why they were not followed up, it may be a resourcing issue on the day for the WAEC. I am sure that in their review of their officers' conduct on the day, they would be looking at that, because we have certainly made them aware of it.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there anything else we could do to improve the process? For instance, in Victoria, apart from authorisation, they also require the registration of material that will be distributed on election day. That tends to resolve some of the questions around: is this properly authorised or not? You either have a registered piece of material that the Electoral Commission is aware will be distributed on the day or you do not, which seems to resolve those issues in a quicker and sometimes more transparent manner. Would that be something that would be advantageous to our political process or would it unfairly hamper freedom of speech and freedom of expression?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I will make a comment on that, Mr Chair. I think you could potentially run the risk of freedom of speech. Certainly political parties and organisations who are participants in the campaign, such as unions, who are traditionally involved in campaigning, probably are quite flexible and nimble in the way that they deliver their messaging in the lead-up to polling day. I do not think that we would want to see some impacts on freedom of speech in that area, but I think what we do need to understand, and potentially the WAEC needs to look at, is where there are public participants in a campaign, as the CME were in this instance—that was no secret—where the WAEC are aware of third party participants, in the same manner in which they proactively engage with political parties to advise us of rules and regulations, which they do very well, there needs to be some sort of proactive approach to third party organisations to ensure that they are adhering to the rules and regulations, because we all want a fair playing field. No-one has an issue with anyone running their voice during a campaign, but we should expect, and I think the public do expect, a fair playing field.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not think there is any doubt about that, but how far do you go? I mean third parties could be anyone; it could be the local kindergarten that have a concern and distribute some leaflets on the day.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Absolutely. I think we would all defend the democracy of people being able to do that. I certainly do and the Nationals do. But where it is obvious that an organisation is having ongoing involvement in a campaign, I do not think it is unreasonable that the public expect, and political organisations or other participants in the campaign would expect, that the WAEC as the overarching regulator of that campaign or that election should be proactively engaging with those third party participants and ensuring that they are adhering to the rules. In defending their role, they need to make sure their regulations are transparent and that they have conducted themselves in the manner in which the public would expect them to.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any other examples of non-adherence to the rules other than the distribution of unauthorised election material?

Mr GLOSSOP: It was the lack of awareness of their responsibility to report their financial campaign. We have written to the WAEC again for clarity after they put in their report. We have not had a response to that yet.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think the penalties could be firmed up in that regard in relation to financial reporting? Does the onus always have to be on the WAEC or should the onus be on the participants in the process to adhere to the process that they are participating in and perhaps look at the sort of penalties that would apply?

Mr GLOSSOP: Yes, definitely. I mean ensuring compliance is the onus of the person who is undertaking the act. We have been informed that it would be unlikely there would be any punishment under the existing fines that could be in place, and that is where part of that problem can develop. If other organisations then do not comply with the reporting process, what punishments in fear of not doing that will be there? We would definitely be encouraging compliance.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: In terms of the material on polling day, you said that there was unauthorised material on a polling booth, which was obviously acknowledged as being that by the WAEC, and the text message had gone out. Is there—maybe others can answer this question—any impediment to the people on that polling booth from other parties or other organisations then being able to take that material down, saying, “That’s actually illegal; it’s unauthorised. The WAEC has made a ruling”? If they do not have the necessary, I suppose, capacity at that point in time, because of the lines and the work that they are doing, to take it down, should not the other people working on that polling booth be able to take that down saying it is illegal? I do not know whether it is illegal for a person to take down someone else’s material if it should not be there in the first place. Maybe you are not the right person to answer this question, but do we need to change the rules to allow others, on the direction of the WAEC who are at the polling booth, to be able to say, “All that material, we haven’t got time to take it down, but it’s all illegal. It all needs to come down and somebody needs to take it down.” Obviously you ask people who put it up first, but if they are not there, then anyone else interested in helping—go for it.

Mr HAYWARD: I think that would be very, very unwise. I think there is already enough angst between different members of different groups who are very enthusiastic, and we want to encourage people to participate positively in the process. I think the opportunity to have a stand-up fight with somebody out the front because their sign was authorised apparently by an organisation, not a person, would really be very, very detrimental to both the experience of the volunteers on the day and also probably the people in the area. I think it would be very unwise to do that. I also do not think it is our political parties’ or our volunteers’ job to interrogate those matters—that is a job for the WAEC. I may have the opportunity to speak a little more about that in relation to the Pilbara rolls a bit later on. I think it would be unwise; it is the Western Australian Electoral Commission’s responsibility and I think they need to be able to make a ruling on the day. I would have thought that they have the authority to have signs removed. Certainly, if they do not have that authority then that is something that perhaps this committee might make a suggested outcome, because they certainly need to be the people in charge. Generally, when our people are on polling booths they listen very carefully to what the representative from WAEC says. They tell us where we can put our signs, where we cannot, how far away—their interpretation of 10 metres might be a bit further than ours, but we listen to what they have to say and respectfully follow their instructions. I think it would be the wisest move to make sure that the WAEC is resourced to be able to deal with matters like that on the day.

[9.30 am]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: So do you think on those booths where those signs were taken down it was because they did not have the people to do it or because the message did not get through or they did not give it a priority? Do you have any other idea about why they did not do it?

Mr HAYWARD: It is very difficult for us to be able to guess what the situation was on the day. Often in those places, though, you do not have a single person, or few very people, from the WAEC involved, and some of those places are remote spots as well. I cannot make a comment as to what the motivation was or why that did not happen. All we can say is it did not happen and those signs remained on those polling booths over that period.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Mr Chair, can I make a point of clarity? It was not that the signs or the core flutes were not authorised; they just were not authorised correctly.

Mr HAYWARD: Yes, sure.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I think the other thing to note, and this may be something for the committee to consider in its report, is that we did table in our submission the corflute we were talking about. You can see how very, very small the font is. In the interests of the public understanding who is delivering that message, maybe some regulation around the size in the authorisation might help people going into the polling place.

The CHAIRMAN: There is a proportionality there, is there not? There are different proportions when you are looking at an A4 sheet of paper to looking at something that is five metres by five metres.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I know all political parties take those regulations in producing campaign material very seriously, because we are subject to public scrutiny. I think it is not too much to ask for third party participants to also be subject to that scrutiny.

The CHAIRMAN: Can I ask a question in this regard and then we will go to the deputy chair. In your experience, is there a cultural difference between campaigners from political parties as opposed to campaigners from third party organisations in the way they conduct themselves in campaigning, particularly on polling day or at pre-poll centres?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I guess in answering whether there is a culture, I think political organisations and their candidates are very well versed, and as an organisation I know that in the Nationals WA we engaged with our candidates extensively to make them understand what their obligations were on financial reporting, advertising and how they conduct themselves throughout the campaign. I think people who work within those organisations are experienced and well versed in what the expectations and rules and regulations are. I guess that does create a difference in culture for people who might be third party participants and might not have done this before, because there is not an understanding of what their requirements are. But knowing that you are a third party participant and you are on the record as stating such, and you are an organisation that is conducting a statewide campaign, it is your obligation to make sure that you fulfil and understand the rules and regulations in which you are participating. So whether it is a culture, I am not sure that that is quite right, because in our experience as a political organisation we obviously have a format that we work to, as do all political organisations, so we adhere to that. Newcomers or third parties, again, it is their obligation to make sure they are on board with what the requirements are. I do not know if that is a culture.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: With corflutes and that sort of stuff and the authorisation, is that a legislative requirement as it currently sits? Are we looking at a legislative change to address this so that all material is given to the Electoral Commission by a set date, or whatever, prior to an election, and locking it in in that way? Is that what you are seeking? I am trying to clarify it in my own mind.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: No. As we stated previously to a question from the chair, I am not sure that we are suggesting it all needs to be registered. But I guess the committee will look in its report at whether there is a legislative requirement that needs to change to ensure that there is —

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: I think you are suggesting that that is the case. What you are saying is that you are unhappy with what was provided on the day, and I think, without you using those words, you are suggesting that that needs to take place. You mentioned before the under-resourcing of the polling booths, and I agree with what you are saying, that it should not be the people at the polling booths saying what is correct and what is not because that is only going to create animosity, and there is no way anyone wants that in the process. As you say, there is enough, for want of a nicer way of putting it, conflict in the electoral processes now. What I am trying to work out is should this be done? I notice you are not saying that, but —

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I am not saying that, no.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: That is possibly a solution to it, unless you are saying that all election material be registered prior to the actual polling day.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: From my perspective, member, I stated fairly clearly that I was not sure that we agree that there would be the need to impact on freedom of speech, and we would defend the right for people to have freedom of speech. But as our state director pointed out previously, if you are a participant, it is your obligation to ensure you adhere to the rules. It is then the WAEC's obligation, I would have thought, in reviewing the election, where there were issues and areas of concern, as to how they are going to address that. Resourcing may be one area, and I would suggest the committee may consider in your report what other suggestions you would have for the WAEC to follow up on what could be a better-run process next time.

Mr HAYWARD: If I could just add something very quickly, I think also when you consider the level of impact of these third parties, if we look at what the CME participated in, they spent certainly much more money than we did as a political organisation. I think they rivalled what was spent by the Liberal and Labor Party very closely. So they were a significant player in this election space. Our view is that, as such, the WAEC has an obligation to make sure that a player of that size and capacity is playing by the same rules that everybody else has to play by. We would not be supporting political signage being registered or pre-registered. I do not think that is what we would want to be about. What we want to be about is making sure there is a level playing field. If you are going to spend over \$4 million impacting a campaign, as the CME did, then you have obligations that ought to be the same as ours, and those obligations ought to be met, or that insistence should come from the WAEC and apply to them.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: My question is to you, then, without speaking over you. At what point does that trigger this obligation? As you mentioned before, is it mum and dad handing out leaflets from the local day care centre versus a large CME campaign or the campaigns here in the city about the privatisation of Western Power? At what point does that kick in?

Mr HAYWARD: With the greatest of respect, if it was an issue where the local Newman kindergarten had an unauthorised sign, we would not be raising it here today. But that is not the issue that is in front of us. We have a participant who spent significant amounts of money campaigning on television, radio, corflutes and others, and what we are saying is that if you are going to participate certainly at that level, we believe there needs to be a level playing field.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Going back to my original question, at what point does that particular third party player come in? What are your thoughts?

Mr HAYWARD: Again, I think, and Jacqui made it reasonably clear as well, if you are openly announcing that you are participating in the process—so the difference between the Newman kindergarten and the CME or UnionsWA is that they are actively involved in the process, and that

can be seen quite clearly. I think if you are making public statements and you are out spending significant money, the WAEC should be engaging with those people and those organisations.

[9.40 am]

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Mr Hayward, you know how much the CME spent because it has lodged its return. Is that correct?

Mr HAYWARD: That is correct. We know what it spent, as I understand from the writs.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: We would all be familiar here with the Electrical Trades Union's "Don't privatise Western Power" campaign. It has not provided any return because it is a union and in this case, I expect perhaps it is governed by different laws. Are you suggesting that we should also uniformly cover unions in that respect as well?

Mr HAYWARD: I absolutely do. I think they are certainly a third party player again, very, very active in the space, in my space in Bunbury—more active than the CME.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: With respect to the 12 polling booths within the Pilbara, how many of those polling booths did not comply with the WAEC order to remove the offending posters on polling day?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: It is my understanding, member, that only the Newman polling booth had those corflutes removed.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: So, 11 in that case. Just to clarify, the CME poster it concerns states the authorisation is by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, Perth, and printed by the Bokay Group, 12 Raymond Avenue, Bayswater. I am assuming that the offending authorisation is because there was no individual identified. Is that the case?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: That is correct.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: That is all.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I would like to come back to the point raised by the member for Burns Beach. As I understand it, you are proposing that the WAEC increase the level of compliance and be resourced effectively to manage compliance in relation to third party participants, but I still get a sense there is some sort of subjective evaluation of what constitutes a third party participant. The issue of union participation has been raised; the CME participation has been raised but there is an enormous number of participants but a broad definition of that in a lateral process. So can you give us any more guidance as to a threshold or a specific trigger that you think should elicit a response from the WAEC compliance and take it out of the subjective ground?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: It is difficult at the moment, actually, member, I would have thought, to take it out of the subjective realm because we are making observations of what occurred in the past tense. We are trying to learn from that process as well. I am very happy that the committee is looking at that process also. I will reiterate that we all, as representatives of our organisations and our roles, have an obligation in which we become aware that in this case, a third party participant is clearly heavily involved from a media perspective, a campaign perspective. They are on statewide television. The WAEC at some point during that campaign period—we are talking over a fairly long period of time that this particular campaign ran—was aware that there would be a process in which the WAEC would come together with the people who are running the campaign and say, "Actually, the public is aware that there is a big third party participant in our election campaign with our obligation to ensure that they are adhering to and understand that there are rules and regulations around that participation." Nobody is saying they cannot participate, but I think there is an assumption from the public, in my anecdotal conversations with people since the election, that they

are being monitored and are aware and have been engaged with the Electoral Commission, who are in charge of running the election campaign.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Is it a monetary cost or is it a media cost? For example, if you get a Hugh Jackman, who jumps on as our third party who tries to —

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Happily endorsing the member for Burns Beach!

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Yes. A personality that runs it, but does not actually draw on any funding et cetera, versus the CME campaign that had significant funding behind it. Do you notice there is a difference there? Is it the financial cost you are talking about or is it the media cost you are talking about? If you have someone with a profile, they could be doing exactly the same damage or have a different view from a campaign but not actually costing a cent. What are we talking about here?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Member, I will just add some comment and let other members who want to. I think in a global sense of the way the political environment is running, we have seen the Brexit campaign globally; we have seen the American election and the concerns of people's third parties having undue influence in the state of play. If we come back to Western Australia—Western Australia's state election to vote to have people represent them in the Parliament of Western Australia—there is an obligation on the WAEC to ensure that the election campaign is being run outside of undue influence. I actually do not think it is a matter of how much money you have spent or whether you have got a high public profile. From a WAEC perspective, they are looking at financial obligation as the, I guess, basis of reporting. So if you are purely looking at the WAEC process—I would assume that is the area in which you are coming from, because that is the reporting requirement—I think there is growing concern in Western Australia, nationally and globally about third party influence on campaigning. What we are asking the committee to consider, and subsequently the WAEC to consider, is what their role is in ensuring transparency and a fair playing field for all participants, so that we do not see undue influence by third parties as we have done in other areas.

The CHAIRMAN: I know you have some other concerns as well and we are pretty time limited today. We have a joint sitting of the Parliament relatively soon. You expressed some concern about electoral rolls. Do you want to expand on that? I know it is in your submission, particularly around perhaps the area of direct enrolment.

Mr HAYWARD: Yes, thank you very much, if I could answer that, Mr Chair. We became aware of a significant spike in the enrolments in the Pilbara district. After the election, we discovered that most of the, I think, around about 3 888—the number moves a little bit, but I think that is about the total number—turned up on the rolls in August and September. We wrote to the Electoral Commission raising concerns about those. It was around, I think, 18 per cent—a significant increase in the size of the electorate—and we got a letter back from the WAEC saying, “Look, it's got to do with auto enrolments.” At that point, I contacted the WAEC back and said, “Look, could we meet to discuss this matter?” Initially, they said yes, they would. After that we became aware that there was some political activity around one of the fly in, fly out airports where one of the parties, One Nation I believe, had been encouraging people to change their enrolments up to the Pilbara—so, potential workers that may not be entitled to vote within that district potentially. Our concern was that they may have been encouraging these people to opt into that electorate, so we were keen for that to be investigated. We subsequently wrote back to the commissioner once we became aware of this and asked him to have a look at that. He since wrote back to us and said that he would not meet with us, which I think is disappointing, and said if we had any more concerns effectively—he did answer some of the questions—then we ought to raise them. We wrote back again and urged him to meet with us and discuss the matters and pointed out some more information from the Pilbara,

including vacancy rates and population drops and other things that had happened within that district; again, it seemed very, very odd that there was such a massive spike. He has written back to us again but has not agreed to meet with us. Our view is that it is not our role as a political party to interrogate the integrity of the Pilbara rolls. We firmly believe that that is the responsibility of the WAEC, and the letters we got back from the WAEC indicated to us that they did not really have the resources to look into those things further, or perhaps it was that they were satisfied that the inquiries they had made answered their questions. But I think it was a little bit disappointing that we as a registered political party were not able to sit down with the commissioner and have a bit of a discussion around the table about what the issues were and about what our concerns were. I think part of that reason potentially may be because there may not be quite the resources there. But, again, the theme of the letters that were sent back to us was, "Well, if you go out and find the information, then we're happy to have another look." Again, I make the point that we do not believe, as a political party, it is our role to investigate the integrity of those rolls. We feel very strongly that that is the WAEC's role. I think that is probably about it.

[9.50 am]

The CHAIRMAN: How does that increase compare to other electorates, perhaps neighbouring electorates, or your experience around the rest of the state?

Mr HAYWARD: It is out of sight. So it is massively higher. So it is interesting that North West Central or north west is the next seat, which also contains three Pilbara towns; those towns of Tom Price, Paraburdoo and Onslow. I think that its overall percentage—look, I am going from memory, so we can provide these numbers—was about seven per cent.

Mr GLOSSOP: When you look at the comparison, the only other ones that are close is Mandurah, which had an increase of almost 14 per cent, from 25 000 up to 28 000.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Dawesville went up, too.

Mr GLOSSOP: Yes, Dawesville was the other one I was just going to get to. It had an increase of 11 per cent, from 26 000 to 29 500. When you look at the comparable previous increases, on 9 March 2015 there was 17 842 enrolments in the Pilbara; on 31 March 2016 there were 17 575. On 30 June there were 17 611, and then on 30 September 2016 there were 20 810. That is where there was a very significant spike that had not been anywhere close before that.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I just clarify. With that spike what I am hearing is that you are attributing that to the efforts of one political party to persuade people to change their enrolment objective.

Mr HAYWARD: No, not at all. Simply, as a political party we believe we have the right to ask questions about why there was such a spike. What we are saying is that we did hear some evidence that some of this activity may have been going on. Obviously, we are in the setting of a very, very large campaign, by unions; sorry, not by unions, but by the CME, who are representing BHP and Rio Tinto, the largest employers in the Pilbara. We simply were not sure what was going on there and what we wanted to do was for the WAEC to investigate those enrolments to see if they were legitimate.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Have you received an explanation back from the WAEC?

Mr HAYWARD: Yes, we have. They have put that down to auto-enrolments, so the merging of roles between the AEC and the WAEC. Once we have investigated that and looked at that information more clearly, it is clear to us that there could not really be any pre-organised activity that would impact those pre-enrolments because they were all done by existing people on the roll. So ultimately we are satisfied, I guess, that—although the number is still very odd to us—but we were given an explanation which made some sense.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: So you are satisfied with the explanation, but the dissatisfaction is that you cannot meet with, or the commissioner has refused to meet with you for a subsequent meeting?

Mr HAYWARD: So the dissatisfaction is, yes, that we did not have the opportunity to meet and discuss our concerns initially, and I am not sure that we really got the real clarity until probably the last correspondence we got. So initially we felt that the commission's responses to us were quite dismissive.

The CHAIRMAN: So you are satisfied now that there has not been anything nefarious in relation to the spike in the enrolments?

Mr HAYWARD: We are satisfied that the information we have would lead us to that conclusion, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mr GLOSSOP: There should be a correlation between the census data and the enrolment data, but we do not believe it is our responsibility to investigate, and that is what we were really trying to ask the WAEC—to go through a thorough process of investigating to make sure there are no anomalies. That is where the disappointment was—that there has not been a response.

The CHAIRMAN: Sure.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Not to talk over you, so what you are saying is that the census data versus the conflict between the two polls is what has identified these X amount of votes, or whatever they were. Would the simple fix be having one electoral roll?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I guess it is something that could be considered, yes. I guess, to add to Simon and James' comments, we provided, in our correspondence to the WAEC, things that did not make sense to us, like the census data and the statistics that showed that there is an increase in vacant properties in the Pilbara and a decrease in the population, but however an increase in enrolments to vote. So it probably could have been cleared up a little bit sooner if the commissioner had agreed to meet with us. As a registered political organisation we should be able to do that, and they certainly were forthcoming in most of the other correspondence and communications we have had with them, but in this instance that was not the case where we had a concern. So it did create doubt about whether the WAEC has been resourced enough to conduct an investigation this complex. There is no doubt about that. But I, as a voter and the campaign director for the National Party, and our candidates, am relying on the WAEC to ensure that the process is correct. So that is really what we were asking. We are still unsure as to the level of resource that the WAEC has to conduct that fully.

The CHAIRMAN: On a slightly different issue but still around participation in elections, we have Mr Hunter here who is a recent president of the Young Nationals. We have seen some figures around youth participation. It is relatively strong for 18 and 19-year-olds in that first election-type euphoria, but then some of the figures we have seen from the participation in this election indicates that groups, say, aged between 20 and 30 have had much lower participation rates than other age groups. Is there anything that you as a party have specifically done to target youth participation; and is there anything that you would suggest would improve that in the future?

Mr HUNTER: Yes. Thanks, Mr Chair, and thanks for the opportunity to come today. I suppose there is probably one in specific relation to the recent state election. It would be the extended pre-poll. For some young people within the community three weeks is a long time, and in terms of when the writs were drawn it was quite a long state election campaign. Specific examples of what we have done as a political party to engage people, especially within regional Western Australia which the National Party seeks to represent, is to—well, the young people to come and join our political party—engage them from a campaign point of view and actually get people on the ground and

talking to voters, and to have young candidates and people who are willing to engage within the youth organisations of their electorates. I think that from an on-the-ground level the National Party is very good at campaigning when it comes to polling booths and the like, and to have Young Nationals out there handing out election day material was something which we thought was a proactive thing of getting young people within the community to engage with the political process. If you want me to be more specific, I can —

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, sure. The figures show, though, that they have not been as engaged as other groups, and they continue to be not as engaged as other groups. Is it simply an expression of the fact that they choose not to vote and would prefer not to be forced to vote?

Mr HUNTER: I do not think so. Maybe Jacqui could answer that one, but obviously in Australia you have to vote. I think that is a good thing. Yes. Maybe I surround myself with people who do love to vote.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Mr Chair, could I just add some observations as a campaign director involved with the Young Nationals.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, certainly.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Under Lachlan's guidance as the president, the Young Nationals are very proactive in spaces where you have a forum to engage with people in that sort of 17 to 19, 20 age group, and that is at UWA open days and Curtin open days. So the Young Nationals, I know—I know other political party organisations—their young people are out in that forum, engaging with those people in that age bracket. When you actually start getting to the 21 to 30, I mean they are all engaging in their career and families and you do not openly have that forum to go directly to those people, whereas you do in a university sense. From a Nationals' perspective, the Young Nationals have done that exceptionally well.

Mr HUNTER: Mr Chair, if I could add one more comment probably from a WAEC point of view or an AEC point of view. What I would like to see and other young people, especially around regional areas for those people who do not choose to go to university or who are engaged in other employment like apprenticeships and that—is to actually enrol to vote. Because a lot of people who are in that 20 to 30 age bracket—some people have not even enrolled to vote. So maybe proactive campaigns from the WAEC to ensure that people are on the electoral roll so that they can have their say when it comes to election time.

[10.00 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Sure. Our time is limited, as I said. Are there any questions any members have that are burning questions, or anything else you want to add today before we close this hearing?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I do not think so, chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for coming along and thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 working days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned in that time it will be deemed to be correct. You cannot add new material via corrections and the sense of the evidence you gave today should not be altered. Of course, if you want to provide any additional material at all or elaborate on any of the points we have discussed today, please feel free to make a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript. Thank you for engaging in this process. As you recognise, we are all active participants in the election so we all are key stakeholders. It is good to get your feedback today.

Hearing concluded at 10.01 am
