

**Division 36: Western Australian Electoral Commission, \$2 663 000 -**

Ms Guise, Chairman.

Mr McGinty, Attorney General: Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs; Electoral Affairs; Peel and the South West.

Dr K. Evans, Electoral Commissioner.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, the question is that in respect to division 36, appropriation be recommended.

Mr OMODEI: Minister, in relation to page 593, decisions taken since the election, I note the electoral boundary redistribution is going to cost \$800 000 this year and \$1.6 million next year and I ask, is it intended that the indicative maps be distributed to members of Parliament? Is there a consultation process in relation to the actual boundaries?

[2.40 pm]

Mr MCGINTY: I will ask Dr Evans to respond to that particular question but if I might, just by way of a little bit of background, answer it in this way. There have been some indicative maps which have been prepared for all political parties by the staff at the Electoral Commission. They are not to be taken as any indication of the way in which things will end up. They are to be taken as an indication of what might happen. A number of those maps have been prepared directly for the various political parties and a number have been prepared for me as part of the discussion leading up to the legislation that is before the Legislative Council at the moment.

The second point I would make is one of time frame. I would hope that the changes to the electoral system will complete their passage through the Parliament in their entirety this year; that is, before Christmas. After the one remaining budget week that we have, we have six weeks left of the Legislative Assembly's time and the matter needs to conclude its tortuous path through the Legislative Council as well, so that may or may not be realised. If the legislation is not passed this year, then we are presented with something of a problem because the existing law requires the Electoral Commission to start a redistribution on 11 February 2002, one year after the date of the last State election. Assuming some changes to the electoral laws will take place, that would mean we would start on a redistribution which will then be aborted if the legislation is subsequently passed next year.

I just make that note about timing, but then once the redistribution process is under way there is contained in the existing legislation, and substantially replicated in the new legislation, a timetable and a procedure which involves the redistribution which will take approximately six months and so if the laws were unchanged, you can start in mid February, by July or August of next year you would have a redistribution completed. I have indicated to Dr Evans that if the legislation is carried, then a new redistribution is required to be undertaken forthwith, or words to that effect, and that I would hope that that would be completed towards the September to December period of next year. It will be a somewhat later completion of that but if I can ask Dr Evans to comment on the availability of the working maps that are done as part of the redistribution process to other people, which I think is your question.

Mr OMODEI: By way of interjection, not only the availability of those maps to members of parliament but to the community.

Mr MCGINTY: Perhaps Dr Evans might answer that.

Mr OMODEI: I should know the answer.

Dr EVANS: The maps that we have done I think have gone through certainly to political parties and I am sure the Liberal Party and have looked at some of them. They are not of great use to the community because our notional distribution has only gone down to the district level in the mining and pastoral region and in the agricultural region and in the metropolitan area and the south west. We have simply said there are enough electors living in that area to make seven districts or 41 in the metropolitan area. It does not give people very much detail except in the two regions I mentioned. We have only drawn these along local government boundaries too which sometimes is not the boundary that you would follow.

Mr OMODEI: I understand that. There was another question I was going to ask on local government. This was on another issue, Madam Chair. In relation to local government, minister, the outcomes of the recent local government election - it was to do with local government elections and the results of those local government elections as far as voter turnouts and the number of local governments that took up the postal voting.

Mr MCGINTY: Page 599, that was the appropriate reference, the first dot point on that page.

Mr OMODEI: Minister, could we get a report from the electoral commissioner in relation to whether there was a success as far as going towards postal voting? Are you happy with the outcomes?

Dr EVANS: In the May elections we ran elections by post for 47 local governments. We have 50 customers. Cockburn and Margaret River were not involved and South Perth were not running elections themselves. We have 50 customers. Those 50 comprise the larger local governments around the State, most of the metropolitan area and certainly some of the large ones in the country, the south west region in particular. In those 50 are more than 80 per cent of the State electors. The 50 have more than 80 per cent, the other 93 or four local governments have less than 20 per cent.

The attendance overall this time was in the order of 34 per cent participation, that is average, across the State. Attendances or participation rates are always low in large local governments so it was lower than I hoped it might be in places like Joondalup and Wanneroo and Stirling but it is four or five times more than what was happening before there were postal elections in those particular electorates. Some of the electorates, for example, Melville, had nearly 50 per cent participation rate. It is not only size. Sometimes it is the issues that are going on, but in my view it is a very successful move to have postal voting available and a lot of large local governments in particular have taken it up.

Mr OMODEI: Minister, is it intended to retain postal voting in local government elections?

Mr MCGINTY: That is really a question for the minister for local government but I am unaware of any proposition to change it.

Mr OMODEI: Are local governments reasonably happy with the cost of postal voting as compared to attendance poll?

Dr EVANS: The vast majority are. We still get some questions about cost but I happen to know that our costs in WA are below the costs of comparable activity in other States. For example, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. Our costs are quite reasonable and it is basically cost recovery so I do not think there is any reason not to be happy with the cost.

Mr OMODEI: Madam Chair, I have no more questions but if I could make a comment. I think the service you provide to local government is excellent and I cannot understand why a lot more of them do not take up postal voting.

Mr MCGINTY: Obviously electoral matters are not as controversial as perhaps they have been in previous years.