

# **ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election**

Melbourne – Monday 2 October 2023

### **MEMBERS**

Luba Grigorovitch – Chair

Evan Mulholland – Deputy Chair

Brad Battin

David Ettershank

Sam Hibbins

Emma Kealy

Nathan Lambert

Lee Tarlamis

Emma Vulin



## WITNESS

Ron Townsend.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the public hearings for the Electoral Matters Committee Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to begin the hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands each of us is gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who have been watching the broadcast of these proceedings.

I am Luba Grigorovitch. I am the Chair of the committee, and I am also the Member for Kororoit. The other members of the committee here today are Emma Vulin, the Member for Pakenham; Lee Tarlamis, a Member for South-Eastern Metro; Nathan Lambert, who joins us on the screen, the Member for Preston; and David Ettershank, a Member for Western Metropolitan. At this point in time I have got apologies from Evan Mulholland, Brad Battin, Sam Hibbins and Emma Kealy.

I welcome Ron Townsend. Thanks for coming in today.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as it is available. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

I now invite you to proceed with a brief 5-minute opening statement to the committee, which will be followed by questions from us. Thank you.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Thank you. I am honoured and was somewhat surprised to be asked to appear before this committee as a result of my very brief submission. In preparation for today I read most of the submissions from the website and realised that perhaps my submission was the only one on the website from a VEC insider's perspective. My comments relate only to my two weeks experience as a casually employed pre-poll booth voting officer at Noble Park in the district of Mulgrave. After the election I was also asked to attend to assist in vote counting and preference distribution.

At the time of the writing of the submission I was interstate in northern New South Wales. Therefore some of the information I presented was from memory, seven months after the event. Since my return in early September I have returned to the pre-poll booth location on Princes Highway in Noble Park. The ground floor area that was leased and used for the purpose of public voting was in fact closer to 650 square metres. The area on the first floor used by the VEC officials was about 120 square metres and not accessible to the public. Notwithstanding my overestimate of 1000 square metres in the submission, this is still a lot of space that could have been utilised more productively by VEC for name checking, ballot handouts and voting purposes.

On the first day of voting new casual VEC staff were asked to attend an hour earlier for signing up and a brief introduction. There were about 15 nervous officers ready to face the voting public and to work with voters with a previously unseen VEC electoral computer program. We noticed a sizeable queue forming outside at 8:25 am and realised that voters were there on an expectation from the VEC website that the booth was to be opened at 8:30. However, signs posted on the doors advised the public that the voting commenced at 9 o'clock.

I also noticed on the window facing out to the public and on the interior walls of the small waiting area a number of posters with a QR code alerting voters to check their mobile phones which lower house district or electorate they were enrolled to vote in, so that once they neared the head of the queue they would be able to be directed to the correct desk. However, these posters on the walls were hardly used by the public, so on the first

day we had voters arriving at the wrong desk and then they had to be redirected to the correct desk. This caused a bit of angst from the voters because they had already spent a fair amount of time queueing and they had to be redirected and requeue again, and of course when they went to the wrong desk, they were given handout cards for the wrong electorate.

On the whole voters were keen to do the right thing. However, the Mulgrave pre-poll booth attracted many outside-district voters in addition to the Mulgrave voters, mainly from Berwick, Bentleigh, Clarinda, Dandenong and Narre Warren South and North, plus Oakleigh. Many complaints were made to people like us on the VEC staff during check-off and ballot paper handouts about the conduct of how-to-vote card volunteers – harassment and intimidation.

I also formed the opinion that two weeks pre-poll would be considered adequate if polling booths were properly staffed to handle extra duties like complaints, queue-jumpers, policing A-boards, how-to-vote volunteers not obeying VEC distance guidelines at polling booth entrances and TV crews seeking access. Long queues were noted – up to 25 metres outside – but we can talk about that later.

While some sections of the media and the public criticise the cost of elections, surely it is better for VEC to spend a little bit more money to ensure there are well-trained, capable and extra pre-poll staff to make the public's voting process less stressful, faster and an easier experience. One feels that the VEC as a public service provider was more intent and focused on the law, transparency and systems compliance but did not appear to consider the voters' needs, expectations and interactions with the VEC polling staff. I am now happy to discuss matters further and answer questions about my experience.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that and also for your submission. I appreciate how you said there were one or two small inaccuracies, but it seems like you really had it down pat. I will hand straight over to Ms Vulin, who I know has a few questions that she wants to raise.

**Emma VULIN:** Thank you, Mr Townsend. Thank you for coming today. I just want to talk about – so you were at the VEC early voting in Mulgrave, and it was an emotionally charged seat. It was the Premier's seat, and I think we had 15 or 16 candidates running.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Yes, it was interesting because Mr Andrews's office was actually 80 metres directly across the road.

**Emma VULIN:** It is opposite, yes.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Every day when we arrived you could just tell from the atmosphere there that it was really highly charged – very vocal – and there were a couple parties there which indulged in a bit of harassment and intimidation.

**Emma VULIN:** I was just wondering: do you think the VEC expected that sort of emotionally charged seat, or were they unprepared for that? Did they prepare staff, saying that this was potentially going to happen, considering they had protests daily opposite, at the Premier's office?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Look, in my submission I did write about the manager who was there. I think they were a bit surprised about what was going on outside – the amount of how-to-vote people out there. Also the manager was not able to communicate too well, and as I said, there were 15 or 16 people in there nervous. I got away with it because I was a bit older than most of them, but most of the people there who were pre-poll staff were in their early twenties and probably less experienced than me – their expectations. I have dealt with the public for a long time. I am retired now, so I am out of it, but these young kids did not know what to expect when they sat down at the desk.

**Emma VULIN:** What training or plan in place do you think they could do to address this, particularly as we have got an election coming up there shortly again –

**The CHAIR:** The by-election, yes.

**Emma VULIN:** The by-election.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** I have worked for the VEC before and the AEC at elections, but I did not work on the desk getting the voters in my face. I was more behind the scenes counting votes and stuff like that, so I had an idea of what to expect.

**Emma VULIN:** If you have worked for both – sorry, in a minute I will ask you about the difference between the two.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Then what happened was because I joined the VEC again they then asked us to fill out training schedules online and they were pretty simple questions about voting rights and what is a correct vote and what is an incorrect vote, that type of thing. But when you get into a polling booth and you get the public – we know how fickle the public can be; people get aggro, it is always the troublesome 3 per cent who cause the problems – but the youngsters you could see were pretty inexperienced and they just did not know what to expect. On top of that, when we walked in, we were then told to go to a desk and we have got this computer in front of us which none of us knew how to use and we were expected straightaway when the doors opened to then go like that and start typing out all the information straightaway. Boy oh boy. It was really tough in the first half hour. People going all over the place.

**Emma VULIN:** Chair, do you mind if I ask one more? I was just going to say, you said that you had also worked for the AEC. Is there a difference in the training between the two?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** I do not recall. The AEC I did – it would have been 10 years ago. I cannot answer that one, sorry.

**Emma VULIN:** Okay. That is okay. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Vulin. I should note that our Deputy Chair Evan Mulholland has just joined this as well online. Just sort of dovetailing off the back of Ms Vulin's questions, obviously many early voting centres saw large queues of voters waiting to cast their vote. In your view, do you believe that the VEC should be rostering or recruiting more staff to work at the booths in anticipation of the early voting?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Definitely. It was obvious when we first got there that they were understaffed. They then allocated the guys. There were five desks for Mulgrave, there were two desks for out of district, if I can call it that, and then there was one desk run by the polling manager per se. What was the question again?

**The CHAIR:** More staff basically.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** More staff, yes. Then we had door greeters and then we had people who were manning the polling booths just to direct people on how to vote properly, and then around the corner there, when they had finished voting, they were then directed to – there were four boxes. There was one for Mulgrave, one for south district and then there were boxes over here for added district areas as well, both lower house and upper house. When we had this problem with people coming in not knowing what electorate they were going to, we then had to try and get more people to actually go out into the queue and ask people, 'Do you know what electorate you are in?' And a lot of people, even though they live in the area, were actually not in Mulgrave; they were outside. That caused the problems because when you get inside we then had to have two queues: one queue to go to the correct desk and another queue over there to be directed to the other district desk. It was obvious that we were understaffed and, as per my submission, we just did not have enough desks.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, understood. Mr Tarlamis, did you have any questions?

**Lee TARLAMIS:** Yes, sure. Thanks, Ron, for your submission and presentation today. You spoke about what had happened at the start and through the two weeks of early voting. At any time were the policies kind of reviewed to take into consideration the circumstances and problems that were being presented?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** No.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** So they just tried to –

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Look, we knew on the first day, when the manager was there trying to work out what was going on, we were understaffed. But at that time last year the VEC was advertising constantly for people like us to volunteer, so we knew straightaway they were short-staffed.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** Yes. The VEC said to us that there were obviously problems recruiting enough people to do the roles and things like that as well. If you are trying to train all the staff up on the escalation processes, the rules and stuff, that could be complicated, but if there was a specific role that was created that was to deal with complaints, de-escalation processes, it could potentially monitor what was happening outside in case there were things that needed to be dealt with there. Do you think that would be helpful going forward?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Definitely. There were so many problems occurring at the seven desks I mentioned that the stuff outside was out of control. They needed another VEC official that could run the outside and leave the inside job for someone else as well.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** Yes. You touched on the length of the queues, and you said that you would come back to that later. In reflecting on that and adding some comments, you mentioned there were door greeters and at one stage they were going out and talking to the voters and people were not using the QR codes. Was part of their role actually explaining to people that the QR codes were there for them to utilise to identify while they were in the queues and working their way up?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Look, the notices were on the wall. People could read them, but they just did not take any notice because they were too busy just talking amongst themselves. So what we did on a couple of occasions was I went out with the VEC app and I was walking up and down the line saying, 'What's your address?' And I would key in the address and say, 'Oh, sorry, you're in Clarinda, so when you go in the door –' We had allocated that Mulgrave electors were to go to the left and the outer districts would go to the right, so that when they got inside after waiting outside – so the queue was running 25 metres in, and then you got inside and then you had a snake queue as well inside. We had allocated those two queues to go to the right desks.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** My final question would be: you also mentioned the conduct of some of those handing out. Do you believe that there should be a firm code of conduct for those people that are handing out and an escalation policy involved to deal with that if they are consistently out of control and are there purely to create havoc rather than actually assist voters in making an informed choice?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** I am surprised there is not a policy anyway, because these guys that were outside were out of control. Am I allowed to mention the parties involved or not?

**Lee TARLAMIS:** It is your submission; you can mention anything.

**Emma VULIN:** You can. It is up to you.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** In Mulgrave there was the Ian Cook guy. He must have had a dozen guys there, and they were big, burly blokes – loud. The Freedom Party was there as well. If there was a code of conduct for how to hand out cards, then it was not being addressed; it was not being followed. There were a couple of occasions when the VEC manager did go outside and try and pull them into line, but you tell them off like that and then half an hour later they creep forward again.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** Yes. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much. I will move over to my Deputy Chair. Have you got any questions, Mr Mulholland?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes, I do. I am just interested to continue along some of the discussion we have been having. It might have already been mentioned, but I am really interested in your point around limiting campaign numbers, perhaps per party. I certainly had in my electorate, and I know in Mr Lambert's as well, one particular issue with one particular party, basically being the Victorian Socialists party. I can recall one example at Broadmeadows which had one entrance at pre-poll, and at one point they had about 10 campaigners and were completely overwhelming some elderly voters. What do you think the optimum number would be of campaigners per entrance?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** So the question is directed to me, is it?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** How many candidates per –

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Just campaigners for one particular candidate.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Oh, you mean how-to-vote handout people?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Surely it should not be any more than three or four per candidate. But if you have got 16 candidates, you are not going to have 50 or so handout – a lot of these candidates are short-staffed anyway, so they are lucky to have one person handing out. But when you have got the Liberals and Labor and maybe Ian Cook – especially Ian Cook, because it was just so plain, in-your-face at Mulgrave that he had far too many people there intimidating people with their handout cards. When you walked in towards the Mulgrave area, there was a gate over this end and a gate over there, and they had guys over there and you had to get past the guys at the other end as well. And people were shaken. We had a couple of people there who were crying because they got flustered by being bullied. So yes, I think there ought to be some sort of consideration to limit the amount of people handing out cards per candidate.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Very interesting points. Thank you. You were chatting about it before – you might have chatted to it earlier, before I came on – but we have had quite a few issues with redistributions and people thinking they are in certain electorates, but they are actually in another electorate. Do you think there needs to be more communication to voters about actually what electorate they are in if there has been a redistribution?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Yes, I did think about that a lot over the weekend in preparation for this. It would be fantastic if we had some sort of system whereby – like, if I had a licence that had my address on it, and then at the bottom of my drivers licence it said ‘electoral district Mulgrave’ on it. When we are at the desk getting the information from the voter, sometimes there is a language problem, and then there is also a naming problem, particularly with the Asians because there are three names – they are back to front, like that. The only way we could overcome that was to have the drivers licence, and that saved so much time. Now, if you had the name of the electorate at the bottom of your drivers licence, half your problems would be finished because you would just keep working. But that comes down to, what, freedom of information and stuff like that, doesn’t it?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Just lastly, your submission talks about – and I think you were speaking earlier about it – more support for people that speak another language. I certainly had a high proportion of those in my electorate in the outer north. What do you think is being done wrong at the moment, and how can we improve the process for people that speak languages other than English?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** That is a hard question to answer because in Mulgrave it is quite diverse. You have got a lot of people from the Indian subcontinent, you have got the Arabic contingent and you have got the Asians. Now, within those three areas you must have dozens of languages. The VEC – it is almost impossible to try and have that many people on call, like me, who speak so many languages. They can only probably cover about 10 languages. How we cope with other languages is just hope that the people who come in – the elderly – come in with someone who is younger and who can interpret on their behalf, for their parents or their relatives. But I cannot answer on behalf of the languages; that is the VEC’s problem, I think.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** No worries. That is all from me, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for those questions. Yes, great points. I wrote some of them down. Mr Lambert, do you have any questions?

**Nathan LAMBERT:** Yes. Thank you, Chair. And thanks a lot, Ron, for coming in and for your submission – I think it was very helpful. A lot of us saw some of the things that you talked about from outside of the polling place, but it is really helpful to have your insights on what it was like inside at what sounded like a particularly tough polling place. You have also picked up on the issues of crowding and things being understaffed and then separately the behavioural stuff that you have just been chatting about with the Deputy Chair. I think they are the two really key things to emerge from your submission. I think it is helpful to know who was involved, so Ian Cook’s people, the Freedom Party.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Yes.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** The Deputy Chair mentioned the Victorian Socialists. Was that part of the issue at your particular booth?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** I do not recall. I am sorry.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** They did not run there.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** And then just to give us a slight sense for it, in total out there, of people handing out how-to-votes, were there 30 people? What sort of number, do you reckon, was the crowd of people handing out how-to-votes in total?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** It would have been around 20 people. Of course in Mulgrave there would have been, I think you said, the 16 candidates, but there would have only been five or six parties strongly covered.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** And you said there was no-one on the VEC team who was individually responsible for the outside section. Is that right?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Well, I can only assume that the manager was responsible for outside, but they were so busy trying to overcome the problems inside that they did not spend that much time outside. Every now and then they did go outside, but there was no-one in my experience that was actually out there on a regular basis just walking up and down and taking overall control of the area.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** Were the police called, by any chance, at your polling booth?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Not in my time. We were rostered on for 5-hour shifts at a time. It was pretty intense. I mean, they did not give us much time off for a break, I can tell you. They used us pretty hard. I do recall the ABC did turn up, and they wanted to come inside to take a snapshot of people putting votes. The ABC guy asked me whether I could let him inside. As a casual it is not my job to direct the ABC, so I had to refer it to someone else inside, and his access was denied for whatever reason. I am not too sure why.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** As I said, a lot of us perhaps witnessed some of those things you are talking about outside. You did mention about people bringing stuff into the polling place – that it was then difficult for the staff to deal with some of the things that were brought in. Can you just expand upon what that looked like? Were people coming in upset about what had happened outside, or were they bringing in aggressive attitudes? What was it that you saw inside the polling place?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Well, once they got inside they tended to be a bit calmer. You would get the odd person, who would be in a queue inside a smaller area which would not have been much bigger than this, full of probably 30 people, who would shout and yell and carry on – ‘Get Dan out’, this type of thing. They were silenced pretty quickly by the VEC staff to adhere to public decorum. Other than that, the other problem that we picked up on was every now and then you would get someone who was infirm, could not walk, quite sick, unstable. There was no process for them to be looked after properly. People like the youngsters had to then move people past the queues to get them in there. There were not any chairs for people to sit down in, so if you were sick or elderly and you were infirm – no chairs. So we just need to look at that with the VEC as well.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** Chair, I have got a couple of other things quickly, but I might instead just throw. I am conscious Mr Ettershank should get to go first, and if not, then I will come back.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. All right, thanks, Mr Lambert. Mr Ettershank, are you still with us, and do you have any questions?

**David ETTERS HANK:** Yes, I am still with you, but I have no questions. Thank you to Mr Townsend. I appreciate that.

**The CHAIR:** Sounds like it is Mr Lambert’s lucky day. You have a few more minutes.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** Thank you, Chair. Just on a separate matter, you talked about the computer system that you had no training on. What was that computer system being used for?



**Ron TOWNSEND:** Basically, the process is the voter will come up to you, and you have to tick off their name. Once they you gave you the name, you would type that in and that would come up with an address. Then you actually had to ask the person what the address was, because you could not assume that the person in front of you was actually the person that was on the computer screen. So when you got the address, you then pushed a button and it would tell you what electorate they were in. Then you had to ask the voter 'Have you voted at this election before?' or something like that, and they had to say yes or no. Once you did that, you then handed out the ballot papers. Is that the type of answer –

**Nathan LAMBERT:** No, that is really helpful. It is the roll mark off.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** In the beginning of course you sit down and you do not know which button to press; you do not know where to go. But once you got into the scheme of things, it was quite easy to run down.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** You spoke about the challenge, which we have all encountered in different contexts, that sometimes people's first names and family names can be in different orders. Did the system automatically suggest to you 'You've tried looking for this particular combination, but it might be this other person', or did you have to re-enter different combinations yourself until you found the person you were looking for?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** No, there was no system for that. In Springvale you have a lot of Nguyens and Ngs. So you type in 'Nguyen' – on the screen you would have 300 Nguyens all the way down the screen. Then you would ask for their second name, so you would put in, let us say, 'Lim'. So you type in 'Lim'. The trouble is Lim was not the second name, it was the third name. So then you had to go back again and keep swapping the three names backwards and forwards, trying to get the right order. Of course this was exacerbated by the fact that sometimes when you had got the licence from the person, the details on the licence, the three names, were different to what was on the VEC screen, so either the VEC had got the name incorrect or VicRoads had got them back to front as well.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** Yes. Sometimes people do enter them inconsistently. I think it is really helpful for us to give some thought to it, because it has not come up previously in the hearings. I do like your suggestion about the drivers licence, although the problem is when the boundaries change the licences would not change.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** That is right. If you do change boundaries of electorates, most of the changes are quite small, and surely VEC's computer program would be able to pick up that area and notify those people that they are no longer in Mulgrave, they are in Clarinda. But that is for the VEC, not me.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** Just finally, if I can, Chair – just one last one. You mentioned, Ron, that you were involved in counting and scrutineering as well.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Yes.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** Do you have any reflections on that part of the process or did it perhaps go a bit smoother?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Not really. Just that when you are sitting down there and you have got all these ballot papers and you have got all the scrutineers around you, it is amazing what they think they see that is wrong with a ballot paper. We had a lot of complaints saying, 'How come we have got all these votes for,' let us say, 'Bill Smith and the numbers all look the same? Therefore there must be some sort of fraud going on.' I mean, you have got thousands and thousands and thousands of votes and they are seeing the number one or the number three all being the same and putting all these protests in to the poor old scrutineer supervisor, and he is pulling his hair out. The scrutineers, they see things when there are not things around.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** You have probably raised some things that are unique to the 2022 election. I am not sure that one is in that category. Anyway, I will finish there, Chair. But thank you again, Ron. We really appreciate your evidence.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** No worries.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your questions, Mr Lambert. We did start at 8 minutes past 2, so we have got about a minute left if any members of the committee have got any further questions. Mr Tarlamis.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** I am aware that at the Mulgrave early voting centre there were a number of issues around signage. What was conveyed to me was that there were a number of repeat offences where parties had complained about other parties being in breach, the VEC would come out and make a determination, it would be temporarily rectified and then after awhile it would just creep back in. But the VEC did not have a process in place to reinforce or stand by that original decision. The onus was on people to make complaints, and the VEC seemed to be quite dismissive, saying, 'We've already dealt with that,' and when it has come back, 'Leave us alone'. And because the onus was on the party for the rules to be adhered to, that led to more animosity: 'Why are you trying to remove our signs?' Do you think the VEC should, once they have made a decision, ensure that that decision is implemented and remains implemented rather than having to start the whole process again?

**Ron TOWNSEND:** Yes. The VEC were reactive to the problems outside in that type of instance. They would rectify it and then they would go inside and wait for another complaint to come in. They did not go outside to make sure half an hour later that the information that was conveyed to that area was actually being complied with. They were just short staffed. They had no-one outside controlling the area. I do not know whether you need to have someone who is VEC appointed or whether you need to have a security officer who acts on behalf of VEC to do that.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** Yes. I tend to think that having someone whose specific role it is to manage that and be across the details at a more in-depth level and have those skills to basically look after that side of things would certainly help. Thank you.

**Ron TOWNSEND:** I think the biggest beef, in summary, is that the Mulgrave area pre-poll was much bigger than VEC had thought, and to have only five desks for Mulgrave and only two desks for outer districts was just not on. To have this big area – they could have put another five desks out there. But in saying that, they did not have the staff to man them. Next time, if they are going to do the same thing at Mulgrave, they really need to run pre-poll a bit like a supermarket, where they have 10 desks, they man six all the time and they have two or three desks which are vacant. Then when it gets heavy or something is going wrong they can pull staff in and say, 'Right, can you go to desk number eight and fix that problem over there, and when it's fixed you can go do something else.' So they are going to run six desks at a time, up to 10 and then back to six, then up to eight and back to six again, a bit like a supermarket.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much for your insights. They have been fantastic, as was your submission, and very much appreciated by this committee. That now concludes today's hearing. Thank you very much for coming in.

**Committee adjourned.**