

Roll divergence in Victoria

On 4 August 2021, the Legislative Assembly referred an inquiry into whether Victoria should participate in a national electoral roll platform to the Electoral Matters Committee (EMC).

The Terms of Reference of the inquiry set out 3 key matters that the EMC should consider. These matters include:

- the possible implications, if any, of a national electoral roll platform on the independence of the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC);
- the security and integrity of Victoria's electoral systems; and
- mechanisms to ensure the security and integrity of electoral systems and events in other jurisdictions around Australia and internationally to determine best practice.

The VEC provided a submission to the inquiry on 22 October 2021. While not requested by the inquiry's terms of reference, the EMC has expressed to the VEC that the committee is interested in the progress the VEC has made to reduce roll divergence in Victoria. This document sets out the progress the VEC and Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) have made since 2019 to significantly reduce roll divergence in the state.

Causes of roll divergence

Roll divergence occurs when there is a variation between the Victorian register of electors, and the copy of the Victorian Electoral Register maintained by the AEC.

From the perspective of the enrolled population, roll divergence is defined as existing when a person is enrolled at a different address on the Commonwealth roll to the state roll or is on one roll but not the other.

There are several causes of roll divergence:

- The use of different data sources for direct enrolment
- Variations in direct enrolment program schedules
- Different business rules relating to direct enrolment
- Variations in the suspension of direct enrolment for major electoral events
- Impact of non-residence objection processing on split enrolments
- Differences in legislation
- Prior to the suspension of the VEC's online enrolment, those forms not being accepted by the AEC as a joint form.

Roll divergence is an issue known to electoral management bodies across Australia, although there are variations among jurisdictions as to the arrangements for managing enrolment

processes. In Victoria, roll divergence is based upon the Victorian register of electors, and the copy of the Victorian electoral register maintained by the AEC.

What is the VEC doing to reduce roll divergence?

The decision in 2019 and the subsequent application for the VEC to accept enrolment and updates to electors through the AEC's Federal Direct Enrolment Update (FDEU) in 2020 has led to a significant reduction in divergence. The initiative has afforded the opportunity for the Victorian register of electors to have access to information provided to the AEC via Services Australia, the Australian Taxation Office and the National Exchange of Vehicle and Driver Information System. This information is in turn used to verify and update the information in the Victorian register of electors.

As of 30 June 2020, there were 158,996 divergent electors. The VEC has made significant progress through the successful application of FDEU to reduce roll divergence.

As at 31 July 2021, the majority of the roll divergence had been resolved, with only 58,836 divergent electors left in Victoria, or approximately 1.36% of the total Victorian roll. Approximately 90% of the 58,836 divergent electors are historical divergent records and occurred prior to 30 June 2020.

The AEC and the VEC continue to cooperate at the operational level to address existing roll divergence and minimise further divergence through the Joint Roll Management Operational Working Group.¹ Through the working group, the AEC and the VEC have committed to ascertaining the nature of these historical divergent records, with a view to reducing this historical divergence further.

It is the view of the VEC that with the application of FDEU and other integrity activities, including the potential for further information sharing arrangements, divergence within Victoria is no longer a significant concern.

¹ The working group forms part of the governance structure of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the AEC and the VEC. The SLA sets out the operational aspects of the Governor-in-Council arrangement under section 20 of the *Electoral Act 2002* for the purposes of a joint enrolment process with the Commonwealth.