



Office of the President
Hon. Nazih Elasmr OAM MLC

30 September 2020

Executive Officer
Electoral Matters Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

By email: emc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Tarlamis,

Inquiry into the impact of social media on elections and electoral administration

Thank you for your letter dated 11 August 2020.

Social media is used by the Victorian Parliament to share information with the Victorian community about the work of Parliament and its committees, our history and procedures, and community events at Parliament House. We use a variety of social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube, as part of our comprehensive community engagement strategy.

We have experienced strong growth in our social media following over the past few years. In 2019-20, for example, our Facebook following increased by 34% with more than 17,000 additional page likes. By September 2020 we had more than 72,000 page likes. As significant numbers of Victorians use social media, we will continue working to grow the reach of our social media. We want to connect with more Victorians and share with them news from Parliament and encourage their engagement with us, particularly our committee inquiries and our community events.

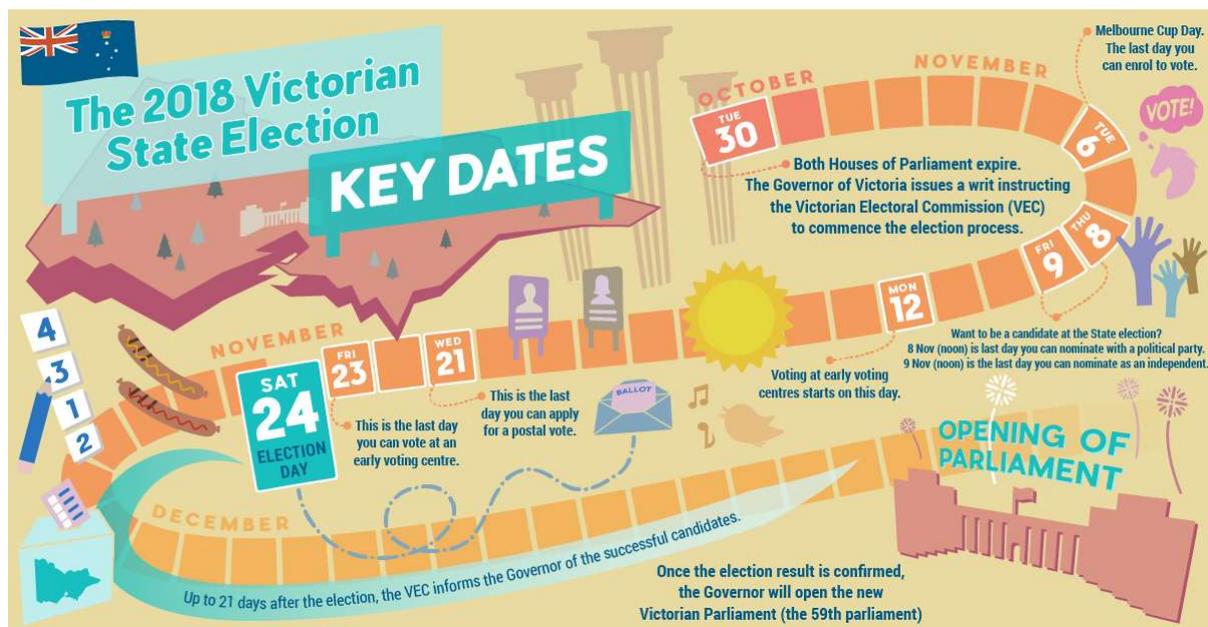
In considering the terms of reference for this inquiry into the impact of social media on Victorian elections, we recognise that the Victorian Electoral Commission has the primary role to inform the community about the electoral process. At the same time, we see that Parliament can also make an important contribution to encouraging community participation in Victorian state elections.

Showing to the Victorian community the detailed work undertaken by Parliament on the community's behalf can help to build understanding of and respect for parliamentary democracy in our state. Providing opportunities for people to engage with Parliament through social media helps to strengthen the relationship between the community and our elected representatives.

Over the past few years, we have publicised on social media opportunities for people to have their say to a variety of committee inquiries. We have conducted community forums on social media, including one to commence this inquiry. We have also helped to explain in plain language and through engaging material how our parliamentary system works. The increased following that we have experienced across all our social media channels is a good indicator that the community is interested in the work of Parliament and wants to engage with it. Enhancing community appreciation of our parliamentary institution is an important part of encouraging people to participate in elections for Parliament. At all times, the material posted to our social media is apolitical. This is particularly important in the lead-up to a state election, to ensure that Parliament's social media channels do not in any way influence people in who they choose as Victoria's elected representatives.

At the same time, we recognise that we can share information about our electoral process to better inform the community about that process and how they can participate in it. This was the approach we took in the lead-up to the 2018 state election, which provides a good case study.

Ahead of that election, our community engagement team assisted by a range of other parliamentary staff developed and implemented a comprehensive plan for using social media to inform the community about the upcoming election. The plan included a series of posts about the key dates leading up to the election, highlighting for example the last day for people to enrol to vote, the dates for candidates to nominate, the date to apply for a postal vote and the date that early voting centres opened. Examples of the infographics we used are provided below. We also produced video material for social media explaining how government is formed in Victoria. In many of our social media posts during that period we linked to relevant pages of the Victorian Electoral Commission's website to ensure people could access directly the information they needed to enrol, nominate and vote.





Our social media posts in the lead-up to the 2018 state election reached thousands of people, at a time when we were still growing our audience for social media. Using a similar approach for the 2022 state election is likely to reach more people, as our social media following has increased significantly since the last state election.

In recent years we have also been expanding our overall news and information service that we provide to the community, including news alerts, feature stories about Parliament and its committees, as well as news videos. We have been using our social media channels, website and other communication channels to provide the community with accurate and engaging material about Parliament, helping to increase the community's awareness and understanding of Parliament's processes and work.

On our social media we have been addressing actively any misinformation by applying editorial guidelines to posts, responding to inaccurate posts, correcting the record as needed and actively filtering posts that breach our guidelines.

Further expansion of our news and information service is underway, which will enable us to connect more people with Parliament. Increasing our efforts to build interest in our Parliament will, in our view, contribute to people engaging more in our state elections. As we move towards the next state election, we would welcome opportunities to collaborate with the Victorian Electoral Commission in providing relevant information to the community about elections.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Nazih Elasmr OAM MLC
President of the Legislative Council