

Statement of Intent

Electoral Commission
Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri

2018/2019 - 2023/2024



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Foreword

The 2017 General Election was a success with increased turnout generally (79.8%), but especially among 18 to 24 year olds which increased by 6.5% and among Māori voters which increased by 3.5%. Voters reported high levels of satisfaction with services and found voting places and advance voting places to be convenient.

With the success of 2017, we have seen a significant change in voter expectations in recent elections which is placing increasing pressure on our services, staff and funding model. The Commission needs to provide information and services in ways that meet the increasingly diverse needs of New Zealand's communities and there is a growing expectation that services be delivered at a time and in a place that is convenient to people.

Electors expect to interact with us in a simple and efficient way. Voters are showing a preference to vote in advance, to access enrolment and voting services in voting places based on real-time information and to receive information electronically rather than by post.

The Commission sees itself at a tipping point where change must happen to meet these ongoing expectations and challenges that lie ahead.

With experience from previous general elections, and feedback from voters, staff and political parties, within the constraints of the legislation we are moving to simplify and modernise our services to better align them with the needs of electors while at the same time ensuring high standards of integrity.

In this coming year we will be working through the detail of what change and improvements the Commission can make over the period covered by this Statement of Intent.

During the first phase of planning we have determined four strategic themes that will be the focus of the next three years and beyond:

- Integrity
- Our People
- Our Customers
- Partnerships

These themes will be at the heart of all the planning and implementation that is to come over the next three to six years.



Hon Sir Hugh Williams QC
Chair



Kristy McDonald QC
Deputy Chair



Alicia Wright
Chief Electoral Officer

Introduction

The Commission is an independent Crown Entity under the Crown Entities Act 2004 responsible for administering all aspects of Parliamentary elections, by-elections and referenda. It is independent of Ministerial direction other than giving effect to directions to support a whole of government approach as required under s107 of the Crown Entities Act 2004.

This Statement of Intent, covering the six year period 2018/19 to 2023/24 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of section 141 of the Crown Entities Act 2004 and has been developed within the context of the Government's expectation that improved services are delivered within tight fiscal constraints.

Functions

The statutory objective of the Commission is to administer the electoral system impartially, efficiently, effectively, and in a way that;

- facilitates participation in parliamentary democracy;
- promotes understanding of the electoral system; and
- maintains confidence in the administration of the electoral system.

To fulfil its objectives the Commission:

- is impartial, acts in accordance with law, and maintains its independence;
- is committed to protecting electors' privacy;
- supports the rights of voters to vote without undue influence and in secret;
- undertakes community engagement to promote participation in elections, particularly in communities that have lower rates of participation;
- works with community groups and schools to promote understanding of MMP and how to participate;

- works to reduce barriers to participation, both for voters and for parties and candidates;
- maintains a comprehensive and accurate elector roll;
- delivers timely and accurate election results;
- is open to public, judicial and parliamentary scrutiny.

Activities

The activities of the Commission comprise:

- registering electors and maintaining the electoral rolls, including supplying the rolls to local authorities for the 2019 and 2022 local authority elections
- promoting public awareness of electoral matters including the conduct of education and information programmes
- conducting the 2020 and 2023 General Elections, including the allocation of broadcasting funding
- conducting by-elections and referenda as and when required
- conducting the Māori Electoral Option between 3 April and 2 August 2018
- administering compliance with electoral laws by making available information, including advisory opinions, to assist political parties, candidates, and third parties to meet their statutory obligations with respect to electoral matters
- supporting the boundary review process to be undertaken by the Representation Commission in 2019
- registering political parties and party logos
- considering and reporting to the Minister and to the House on electoral matters including the provision of independent, high quality advice on proposed or desirable changes to electoral laws
- filling any list vacancies as and when they arise

Strategic mission

New Zealanders trust, value and take part in parliamentary elections

The Commission wants New Zealanders to understand their electoral system, to have trust and confidence in our administration of their electoral laws, to find enrolling and voting easy, and to value and exercise their right to vote.

End state

New Zealanders expect a democratic process which is free, fair and trustworthy. They expect systems to be easy to navigate, information to be provided in an accessible form irrespective of their individual circumstances, and that information to be protected. They want to be able to enrol and cast their vote at locations convenient to them and at a time during the electoral period that suits them.

It is the Electoral Commission's goal to meet these expectations within the confines of legislation and other environmental factors.



Context

Current state of Parliamentary electoral administration

New Zealand has a high rate of enrolment and an accurate electoral roll when compared internationally. Over the last two elections turnout has increased.

Despite increased turnout there remains a need to increase levels of public awareness about electoral matters. There has been limited civics and citizenship education in schools and the community. The growing numbers of migrants to New Zealand have particular needs, especially those from countries with little or no democratic traditions or where systems are subject to manipulation and fraud.

The Commission regards education about the value of voting and encouraging participation as fundamental to supporting New Zealanders to take part in Parliamentary elections. In the main we looked to achieve this through enhanced communication with voters and with community partnerships as well as at schools.

Furthermore, in the 2017 election, increased accessibility and changing voter expectations had a positive impact on enrolment and voting levels. The impact is detailed in the Commission's report on the 2017 General Election published in April 2018.

The planning for the 2017 General Election focused on two critical priorities: promoting voter participation and finding ways to meet the changing needs and expectations of voters.

As part of this focus the Commission employed community engagement advisers and youth advocates and entered into strategic partnerships. We refreshed education programmes and public information and we enhanced access for voters by providing enrolment services in voting places and more accessible voting place locations and times – including for the first time shopping malls and supermarkets, and advance voting on the Sunday before election day and more evenings.

The conduct of the election was successful and we saw growth in turnout of enrolled voters.

However, there were three significant shifts in voter behaviour in 2017 that proved challenging which are forecast to grow more in 2020:

- increased enrolments after Writ Day;
- increased votes cast in advance;
- increased special votes.

These three shifts put significant pressure on our ability to meet service delivery expectations, and on our advance voting, enrolment and official count staff.

In addition, the Commission is currently reliant on the postal service which is rapidly diminishing and becoming increasingly expensive.

There is also an increasing expectation that services will be delivered electronically.

These changes serve to highlight that the Commission needs to further develop a new customer-led service model. To maintain confidence in the administration of the electoral system, continue to provide a good service to eligible electors, and issue results on time, the Commission needs to deliver its services in new and better ways that continue to maintain integrity and elector privacy.

The Commission will consequently review how it delivers all its services and identify how the benefits of technology and process changes may be harnessed in future elections to maintain service levels, whilst continuing its focus on participation.

During the next six months the Commission will be undertaking this review to identify what changes and improvements can be made for the 2020 election towards 2026. This planning process has begun with the determination of four strategic themes and six key priorities. Each of these will be discussed further in this document and will be at the centre of the work the Commission undertakes over the next three to six years.

Outcomes framework

The framework below summarises our services and the results or impacts they will deliver towards our main outcome of a healthy democracy.



Strategic themes

The Commission has identified key themes and priorities. These will drive our work, how we organise ourselves and how we deliver our services. These four themes are Integrity, Our People, Our Customers, and Partnerships and will ensure we are meeting our mission of having New Zealanders trust, value and take part in Parliamentary elections.

Integrity

Transparency International undertakes an annual survey which ranks 180 countries and territories by perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people. It uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt. In 2017 it found that two thirds of countries score below 50, with an average score of 43. According to Transparency International this poor performance is nothing new.

New Zealand, however, ranked the highest with a score of 89 and it has been in the top two since 2012. While this is something to celebrate, it would not take much for New Zealand to begin to fall. Risks such as foreign or domestic interference, security breaches, or fraud all have an impact on perceived levels of corruption.

Maintaining integrity in the democratic process gives New Zealanders confidence in the country's electoral administration and strengthens how New Zealand's integrity is perceived internationally.

The Commission serves as a steward or guardian of the democratic process in New Zealand and all our processes seek to protect it. The accuracy of the roll, secrecy of the ballot, confidence in the election results, and security (both physical and cyber) all contribute to the acceptance of an election outcome as legitimate and to widespread trust in the electoral system.

There are two key elements to maintaining this trust:

1. ensuring all those who are eligible to take part have the opportunity to do so (accessibility); and

2. ensuring there are appropriate safeguards to protect from the risk of manipulation or fraud (integrity).

There is a need for the Commission to maintain a balance between these two elements.

Of particular significance to New Zealand's democratic process is confidence in the integrity of the roll and that the considerable amount of personal information is kept safe. The Commission holds personal information about every enrolled elector in New Zealand including their enrolment history. Maintaining trust and confidence in elections requires that the Commission be a careful steward of roll data, keeping it safe from inappropriate use. Misuse of electoral information could significantly undermine confidence in the Commission and in electoral participation.

Policies, processes and standards are in place to ensure that the data is used appropriately to the extent that we have the authority. It is timely, however, to review these to ensure they are fit for purpose in recognition of changing expectations and a changing environment.

The Commission aims to protect the integrity of the electoral system whilst ensuring there is a high level of accessibility for users.

What do we want to do?

The Commission wants to:

- maintain trust and confidence in the Parliamentary electoral system
- maintain its independence and impartiality, both actual and perceived
- ensure both the physical security and cyber security of its staff, property, materials, systems and information (especially the electoral roll)
- design and implement any changes to the system in ways that ensure continued accessibility

Our people

The successful delivery of our services is highly dependent on the skills, experience, judgment and integrity of staff. In 2016 the Commission took the maintenance of the electoral roll into its structure, growing from 26 to 102 permanent staff, many of whom came from Enrolment Services, NZ Post. This move, which is the first time in nearly 40 years where all aspects of Parliamentary electoral administration is handled by one agency, creates significant opportunity for improvements to the Commission's services to its customers.

The Commission will implement new ways of working together that capitalise on the benefits of this fully integrated organisation. We aim to have engaged, diverse and productive staff who are committed to providing an excellent service.

During the period of this Statement of Intent we will build on the approaches already begun to enhance our performance and build our capability. The planned actions are outlined below:

Key initiatives	Actions for 2018/19 and beyond
Investing in our people capability	<p>Implement recommendations from the review of our capacity and capability to ensure it is fit-for-purpose</p> <p>Continue to train and develop staff in appropriate skill areas and in line with emerging technologies and methodologies relevant to the work of the Commission</p> <p>Introduce cultural knowledge and diversity training</p> <p>Ensure we maintain a relevant and appropriate retention and remuneration programme for high performing staff</p> <p>Performance expectation: annual staff turnover at 6% or less</p>
Leadership and management capability	<p>Implement a leadership and management development programme to build individual and collective leadership and management capability</p> <p>Regular strategic reviews and an annual Board review</p> <p>Annual staff engagement survey</p> <p>Performance expectation: annual engagement survey results for effectiveness (Percentage of staff fully engaged & fully enabled) equal or better than the previous year</p>
Organisational design and organising work efficiently and effectively	<p>Develop a People Strategy, to which all people-related systems, policies, processes and frameworks will align.</p> <p>Update induction programme for staff</p> <p>Continue to support flexible work practices</p>
Leveraging technology and systems development	<p>Maintain robust and functional information, communications and technology</p> <p>Move the information technology infrastructure onto a single, common platform</p> <p>Develop our capability to offer online services (e.g. enrolment, field staff training and public education)</p>



Good Employer

The Commission recognises that a diverse workforce is essential to deliver the services we provide to the public of New Zealand. We aim to provide equal employment opportunities to make the most of the talents and diversity in the workforce. We assess our status as a good employer against the elements and criteria set out by the Human Rights Commission. Over the term of this statement we will continue to ensure that all elements are in place and working well.

Our customers

Our customers are all those people who can participate in New Zealand's electoral system – this is almost everyone in New Zealand who is 18 years or older. In 2017 this was approximately 3.5m people. Our customers include candidates who want to stand and parties that want to register.

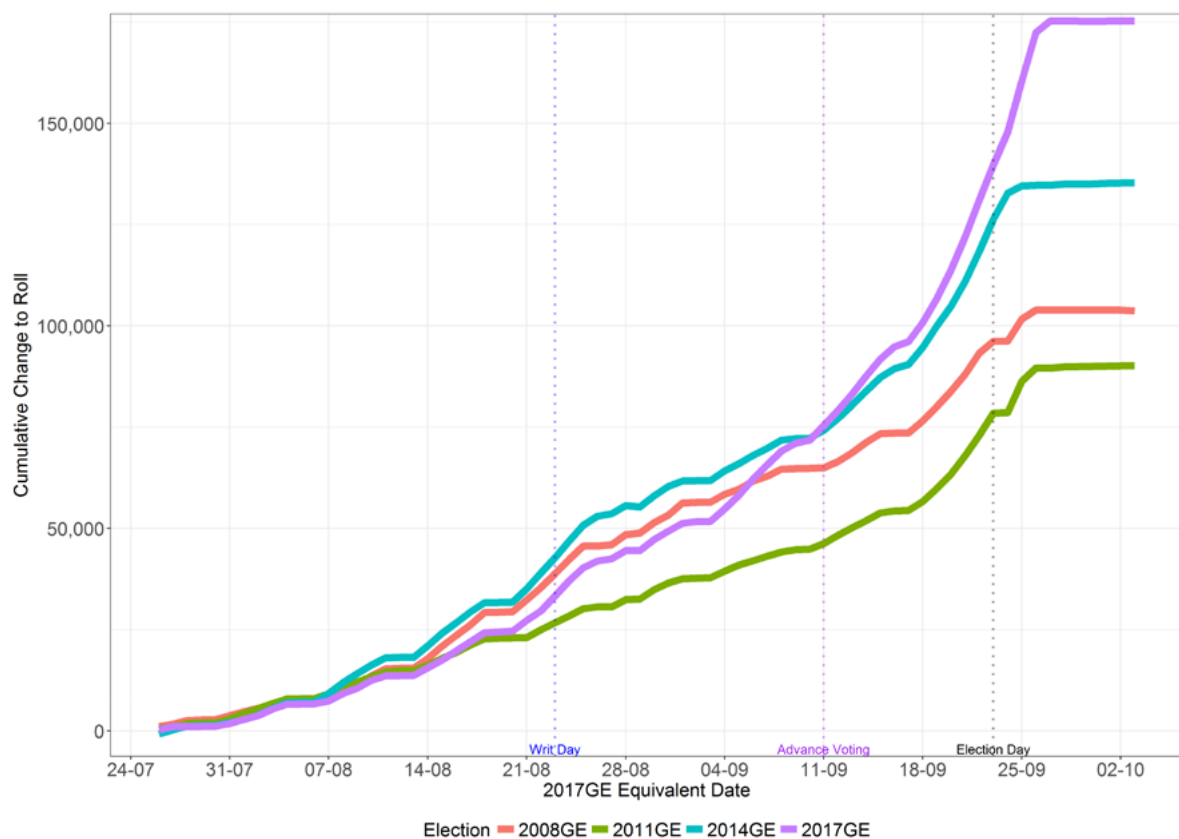
The Commission wants to ensure New Zealanders have a healthy democracy by making it easy for as many eligible people as possible to participate and encouraging high levels of participation. We want to provide information and services at a place and time that is convenient and in a way that meets the needs of our customers. In short, we seek a customer-led delivery model.

Enrolments after Writ Day

In 2017 our customers showed us that they want to enrol when it suits them:

Writ Day is the date at which the electoral rolls used in voting places are printed. In 2017 enrolments after Writ Day grew by 65% over those in 2014. There were 130,000 enrolments after writ day. This is forecast to rise by between 90,000 and 200,000 in 2020.

Graph 1: Cumulative changes to the roll in the two months prior to recent general elections



The current legislation requires those who enrol after Writ Day to complete a Special Vote which takes ten times longer to process. Special Votes are not included in the Preliminary Count on Election Day but are sent to their home electorate, qualified by the Registrar of Electors, and included in the Official Count processes.

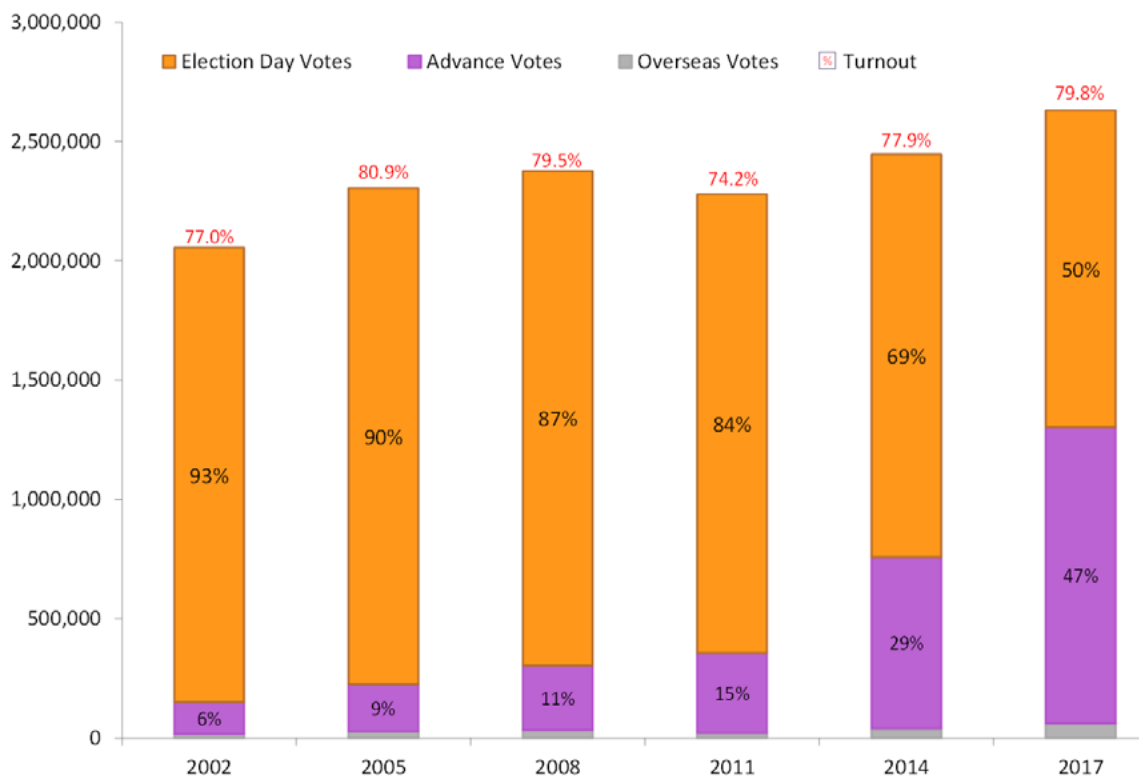
Increased votes cast in advance

In 2017 our customers showed us that they want to vote when it suits them.

Advance voting levels grew significantly to 47% of all votes (1,240,740 votes) compared with 29.3% in 2014 and 14.7% in 2011. The Commission planned for this growth and was able to manage it. However, with more people wanting to enrol, the consequential increase in special votes, and just the sheer numbers of advance voters, queuing, seating and space requirements were affected.

The increased demand for advance voting and the ability to enrol and vote at a voting place appear to be here to stay - for 2020 we will be assuming that advance voting will overtake election day voting and grow again to as much as 60%.

Graph 2: Comparison of election day, advance votes, and overseas votes in past general elections



Note: The expectation is that turnout of enrolled electors will remain at around 78% but the Commission will ensure its services present no barrier to turnout and will be actively facilitating high levels of participation and engagement.



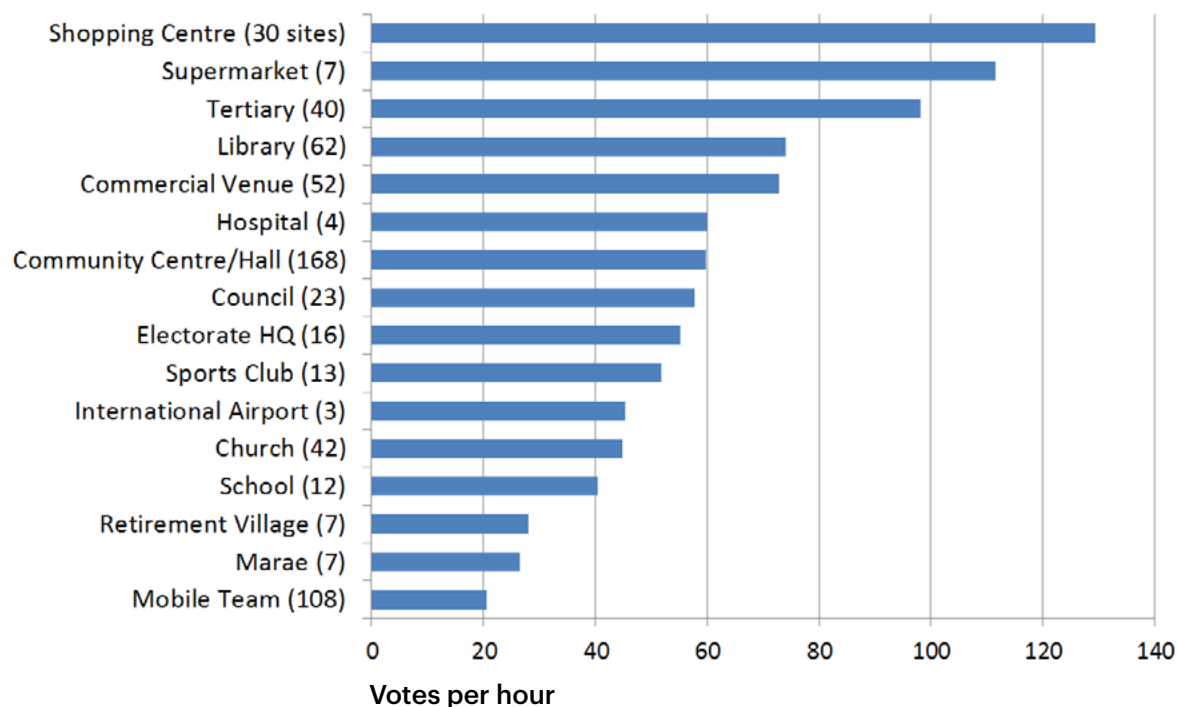
Accessible voting places and increased special declaration votes

In 2017 our customers showed us they want to vote where it suits them:

In line with the Commission's objective to make voting more accessible, wherever possible advance voting places were established where people live, work and congregate. In 2017 at least 94% of electors were within 5km of a voting place or advance voting place.

We focused on using spaces in highly visible and high traffic areas, such as shopping centres, supermarkets, libraries and community centres, schools, universities, polytechnics, wānanga and marae. We also provided mobile voting services in remote locations, Corrections facilities, hospitals and rest homes.

Graph 3: Voting places by popularity



We worked with Foodstuffs North Island Limited and Scentre Group (Westfield) to provide voting services in supermarkets for the first time and to increase our presence in shopping malls. Almost 35,000 votes were taken in the seven supermarket voting places in the Auckland region. In the Te Atatū electorate, for example, in 2014, there were 7,873 advance votes. In 2017, this grew to 20,581. A total of 8,921 advance votes were taken at one supermarket alone. The voting place was open 10.30am to 7.30pm every day including the Sunday before election day.

We adapted our services to adjust to the open-air nature of operating in a shopping mall to ensure voters had a good voting experience. We came up with different approaches to managing voter flows and ensuring voter privacy.

Some voters said the supermarket was their only opportunity to vote. Disabled and elderly voters appreciated taking advantage of fully accessible parking and being able to shop and vote together.

The Commission will continue to increase accessibility to enrolment and voting services and concentrate voting places in easily accessible locations.

In 2017, there was a 35% increase in the number of special votes – 446,287 special votes (compared with 331,005 in 2014). Approximately 130,000 of the special votes were enrolled electors voting outside their electorate.

With the trend towards people enrolling later, and more people voting outside their electorate and from overseas, special votes are projected to continue to grow significantly as the table below illustrates.

	2011 Actual	2014 Actual	2017 Actual	2020 Projection
Estimated Eligible Population	3,276,000	3,391,100	3,569,830	3.7m - 3.8m
Enrolled Electors	3,070,847	3,140,417	3,298,009	3.4m - 3.5m
Electors added to roll after Writ Day	56,971	79,445	130,757	180k - 220k
Total Votes Cast	2,278,989	2,446,297	2,630,173	2.8m- 2.85m
Total Advance Votes	334,558	717,579	1,240,740	1.3m - 1.8m
Total Special Votes	263,469	331,005	446,287	550k - 650k

Note: Estimated eligible population is based on data from the 2013 Census. The age of this data has an impact on the reliability of estimations and projections for 2020 and beyond.

Special Votes have to be transported back from overseas, and from electorates around the country to the electorate where the voter is enrolled.

The deadline for special votes to be received by Returning Officers is ten days after election day. This period is required to allow time for special votes to be returned through postal services and overseas consulates. Special votes delivered after the deadline must be disallowed. Reduced postal services make this timeframe even more difficult.

Special Voting significantly increases the accessibility of New Zealand's electoral system, however, the potential for significant growth has important implications for future elections. Special votes growing to 700,000 – 800,000 by 2026 will place so much pressure on the official count it will mean it would no longer be possible to declare the final result within the two week period.

Additionally, as the proportion of special votes increases, the election night result will give less and less certainty of the final result which can also impact on government formation negotiations.

Candidates, parties and third parties

Candidates, political parties and third parties are critical to the health of democracy. They each have compliance obligations to fulfil and the Commission provides information and advisory opinions on points of law to make understanding and meeting these obligations as easy as possible.

Over the period the Commission will investigate ways of making participation easier so that candidates, political parties and third parties do not see these obligations as inhibitors to their participation.



What do we want to do?

The Commission wants to:

- Make enrolment and voting easier and faster
- Reduce special declaration votes while maintaining accessibility
- Ensure voting places are in easily accessible locations
- Introduce new methods of voting for remote voters
- Develop and begin implementing an information technology strategy that seeks to increase digitisation wherever possible
- Investigate ways of making participation and compliance easier for political parties, candidates and third parties

Partnerships

The 2017 General Election was the second consecutive election with increased turnout. However, these gains are hard won and the Commission wants to build on them but it is not without its challenges. The Commission's approach to increasing participation relies on partners who can help us engage with communities and get information and services to voters. Examples of partnering successes include:

- Foodstuffs (North) providing advance voting places in some of its New World and Pak'nSave stores
- Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK) providing funding for additional Community Engagement Advisors and Youth Advocates
- Supporting On the Fence, Policy and Vote Compass online tools to address one of the major barriers to participation – voters do not know who to vote for

- Pasifika Futures extending our reach into Pacific communities as a Pacific Whānau Ora agency
- Auckland Regional Migrant Services Trust and the Chinese New Settlers Services Trust reaching Asian, Indian and new migrant and refugee communities in Auckland.

Other partnerships included the Warehouse, Countdown and Work and Income Offices who provided customers and staff with enrolment and voting messages.

The Commission also received support from other public sector agencies to help find suitable properties for electorate headquarters.

Partnerships are critical to the Commission successfully delivering its services. These partnerships have evolved over time and the Commission would like to strengthen the partnerships it has and develop new ones with a similar passion for communities. We would like to identify and work with partners who see their community's participation in elections as mutually advantageous.

What do we want to do?

The Commission wants to:

- Maintain high levels of enrolment and voting
- Increase turnout amongst Māori, youth, Pacific peoples, Asian, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities
- Develop and implement a strategic approach for engaging with stakeholders
- Implement tools and processes to support improved partnerships and stakeholder management

Summary of key priorities

	2020 Electoral Cycle				2023 Electoral Cycle			
	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021		2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	
Integrity – how can we continue to protect the integrity of the electoral system?								
Continue to improve our control of materials								
Continue to maintain integrity of the roll including good stewardship of roll data								
People – how can we make the Commission an even better place to work?								
Develop and implement People Strategy								
Improve employee engagement								
Improve how we support community engagement								
Strengthen staff diversity								
Better ways of working together – what is the best way to work together to benefit from an integrated organisation?								
Implement a programme management methodology								
Improve internal communications								
Move our IT infrastructure onto a single, common platform								
Customer-led service delivery model – what services do we need for the future?								
Make enrolment and voting easier and faster								
Reduce the need for special declaration votes								
Investigate ways of making participation and compliance easier for parties, candidates and third parties								
Digital technology – what is our vision of where we are heading in a digital world?								
Develop and begin implementation of an IT strategy								
Implement a new website								
Partnerships – how can we get better at fostering partnerships to support our work?								
Develop and implement a strategy for engaging with stakeholders								
Implement tools and processes to support improved partnerships and stakeholder management								
Continue to extend our electoral assistance in the Pacific region in association with MFAT								

Assessing our performance

The Commission will assess performance through the application of measures. These are summarised below.

Impact	Output	Measure	Target			Frequency
			Year 1*	Year 2	Year 3	
Electors have trust in the electoral process	Maintaining and protecting the integrity of the electoral system	Percentage of accuracy of the electoral roll as determined by annual independent research	85% or more	85% or more	95% or more	Annual
		Adherence to the Commission's quality assurance practices around the integrity of the roll	100%	100%	100%	Annual
		Percentage of enrolment transactions that are conducted digitally	10%	20%	35%	Annual
	Conduct of general elections, by-elections and referenda	Percentage of electors within 5km of a voting place or advance voting place		94%		By event
		Percentage of disallowed party special votes	5% (6% in 2017)			By general election
People understand the electoral system	Provision of information	Percentage of special declaration votes	16% (17% in 2017)			By general election
		Percentage of advisory opinions issued within 5 working days	95%	95%	95%	Annual
		Average number of pieces of correspondence to electors by post	1.27	1.24	1.24	Annual
		Number of people enrolled (monthly average for each year reported annually)	3.29m	3.28m	3.41m	Annual
				3.45m		By general election
People value their vote and take part	Facilitation of participation	Number of 18 to 24 year olds enrolled (monthly average for each year reported annually)	0.315m	0.295m	0.325m	Annual
		Turnout of enrolled electors		0.340m		By general election
		Turnout of enrolled electors who are 18 to 24 years old		2.691m		By general election
		Turnout of enrolled electors of Māori descent:		0.234m		By general election
		Voting staff reflect the communities they serve: Māori		0.357m		By general election
				12%		
				6%		By general election
		Asian		7%		

* Note: Year 1 begins on 1 July following a General Election.



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