

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF THE 2017 STATE GENERAL ELECTION**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 9 AUGUST 2017**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis (Chairman)
Mr M.J. Folkard (Deputy Chairman)
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr A. Krsticevic
Mr D.T. Punch**

Hearing commenced at 9.44 am

Mr SAMUEL VINCENT CALABRESE

Interim State Director, Liberal Party of Western Australia, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to provide evidence in relation to the inquiry into the administration and management of the 2017 state general election. As the inquiry title suggests, we are interested in how the WAEC managed and administered the 2017 election. We are not considering matters such as the voting system or electoral boundary redistribution, which are legislative matters and therefore out of the commission's control. My name is Peter Katsambanis and I am the chair of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. I would like to introduce you to the other members of the committee—the deputy chair, Mark Folkard, member for Burns Beach; Zak Kirkup, member for Dawesville; Don Punch, member for Bunbury, and Tony Krsticevic, member for Carine. It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, this privilege does not apply to anything you might say outside of today's proceedings.

Before we begin with our questions, do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

Mr CALABRESE: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any brief opening statement that you wish to make?

Mr CALABRESE: Yes; very briefly. I think it is worth noting that we obviously had a federal campaign and a state campaign quite close together, so we got to experience dealing with both the AEC and the WAEC. It was definitely great to work with the WAEC and have Western Australians there able to respond to queries and issues that we had without that lag time that you usually experience when having to deal with the eastern states.

The CHAIRMAN: Is it simply the proximity to you that provided you with that experience, or are there any differences in the way the WAEC does things compared with the AEC that make it a better experience?

Mr CALABRESE: I think proximity definitely helps, and we did have a dedicated contact at the WAEC, Sabrina, and she was absolutely fantastic, so credit to her for the help she was able to provide us. I guess probably in addition to that, they may have learnt a few bits and pieces or some lessons from the federal campaign and perhaps the way the AEC dealt with it. No disrespect to the AEC, but it was a little bit more difficult to communicate with them and address issues that cropped up day to day. I think that was definitely due to proximity in having to deal with them, and the time delay.

The CHAIRMAN: From a party perspective, is it more important that you are able to resolve issues as they come about rather than wait until the end of the election to provide feedback?

Mr CALABRESE: Definitely. I have some notes and a few bits and pieces about a few issues that we had. They tend to be the same campaign to campaign, but I think every campaign the WAEC and the AEC get a bit better at how they deal with them or proactively try to fix those issues. Some of them include inconsistencies at pre-poll locations or rulings at pre-poll booths. If you are given instructions at a particular pre-poll booth that you may not be able to set up your signage on the premises due to a commercial arrangement, and then perhaps another party or organisation is there setting up, you are at a bit of a disadvantage, so having that dealt with promptly is quite important.

It is arguable whether it has an impact on the people walking into the booth, but definitely for our volunteers who see that they may be following the rules and another group may not be, obviously having that fixed straightaway is important. That is where having someone locally based in WA was quite beneficial.

The CHAIRMAN: Moving along to pre-polling booths, because that is an issue that has emerged, do you have an opinion or any concerns about the selection of pre-polling sites or the number of pre-polling sites, or how that whole process operated during this recent election?

[9.50 am]

Mr CALABRESE: Yes. There were a couple of issues we experienced. Going through the list: the choice of location often was not ideal. We have had a discussion with the WAEC about that, and I think finding commercial premises where you can operate in the exact same way across the state is very difficult. They explained that is for a number of reasons. As I said, at some locations you could not erect any signage; at others you were permitted to work within the usual guidelines of a polling booth. It is very difficult to understand how to instruct your volunteers and your supporters on how they can set up a particular booth when it changes location to location. The number of booths is another issue. We had a three-week period for early voting, which was quite long—I think probably a week too long. It meant we had a huge number of people going in and voting early. But the number of booths obviously does not compare to polling day in any way, so having an over-saturation period I am not sure is the greatest way to do it. There definitely, in my opinion, were not enough booths to deal with it over that duration.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: As in pre-poll booths?

Mr CALABRESE: Pre-poll booths, yes.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: In terms of the pre-polls, do you think there was an issue with the opening hours, as well as the days? Obviously they were not open on weekends and after business hours. I am trying to find whether that was an issue.

Mr CALABRESE: Yes, and some locations—going back to the inconsistencies—may not have been open nine to five every day, and some were closed on particular days, or may have opened a bit later. So you were never guaranteed that if you rocked up at a pre-poll booth that it was going to be open.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Were there enough workers at the booths? I know that, to take Balcatta as an example, the lines were probably as long as the lines on polling day at some points in time.

Mr CALABRESE: Yes. We definitely noticed that at quite a few locations. For example, at the one in Cannington, there was the same sort of issue where the booth actually looked like it was set up for polling day. There were marquees, signs everywhere and volunteers all over the place from each party, and then, on top of that, organisations who participated would have had at least several people there, and the line was backing up along the street, so it did look like polling day, definitely. It is not something where we asked the WAEC whether they were expecting the turnout to be so high, but I think we have seen over time that there is a pattern where early voting is increasing.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: From a regional seat perspective, given that parties participate and communicate at those booths and use volunteers to do so, did the length of time present an issue from a logistical perspective in being able to put on enough volunteers, and was there a time constraint or any issues that the party encountered? I know there have been instances in the south west, for example, where the location was not ideal and as a result there was significant fatigue and the like on volunteers. Did the party come across any issues like that and any issues with respect to, I suppose, being able to get volunteers on the ground or people on the ground to man them?

Mr CALABRESE: Yes. That is a good point on issues in regional areas and regional booths. Just as an example, after the campaign I went up to Geraldton to have a chat with a few of our volunteers, and that was one of the things that they raised. It was about being able to man a booth for that three-week period, which was quite long. Also, again, to get back to the inconsistencies, in Geraldton, because of a commercial leasing arrangement, they were operating under different rules to booths that we had across the state in regional areas. So it definitely presented more of a challenge in regional areas, where it is always a bit harder to get a large number of people out to man booths.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Just to clarify more about these locations, the thought is that because the pre-polls were located in commercial premises, what you are saying to us is that they looked like they had been booked fairly late in the piece, which hindered the electoral commission's ability to position those booths, for want of a better way of putting it. What are your thoughts on if the electoral commission could lock in, for example, local government facilities a year out, knowing that it is a fixed-term election?

Mr CALABRESE: I think that is quite a sensible idea and may provide a bit more consistency in the location of booths. On polling days, a lot of the locals know exactly what school or what building they need to go to to vote. It is not the same with pre-polling. I think, from memory, that we may have received the first list of voting locations in December, and then that changed all the way up to about February. So the issue was, as they were explaining, to try to find a commercial premises where they could get a short-term lease. I am assuming that is to save a bit of money by having a shorter lease term. But, again, the rules then would change. As another example, in Midland there was a pre-poll location where there was no ability to erect signage. However, a volunteer is quite close to, I think, the building manager or the owner of the property, who gave them special permission to put signage up, which not everyone was quite pleased about.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: So the resolution for this, then, is that maybe consideration should be given to steering away from commercial-based premises and using local government facilities, such as a town hall?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Or schools.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Or schools or something.

Mr CALABRESE: Yes.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: The only reason I am saying not schools is simply because that ties it into an educational facility.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: That is true.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Whereas if you are using a local government town hall, it is not tied into that. If you are booking it 12 months in advance, the local government is given the ability to move other users of that particular facility for the duration of the election. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr CALABRESE: I think being able to provide more consistency both in terms of location and the rules that apply to location is a great thing.

The CHAIRMAN: Would any legislative change be required to override these individual commercial requirements so that when a pre-poll centre is established, there is clarity as to what can and cannot be displayed and how it is treated as a polling booth?

Mr CALABRESE: I am not entirely sure. We are all of the understanding that there are rulings in place around the no-call list, as an example, where there is exemption for, obviously, political material or calls. I am not sure whether that would be the best way to go. If I was a building owner, I perhaps

would not be too impressed with someone nailing a sign into my wall. But, again, any way we can provide greater clarity around rulings and more consistency I think is a good thing.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I just want to shift the focus a bit onto the demand side. Do you have any observations about the take-up by the community of pre-polling in terms of numbers?

Mr CALABRESE: I could not give you exact numbers, but in the federal campaign we saw record numbers, as well as in the state, and we can see that the trajectory is heading up and it is becoming more popular. I could not tell you why that is, but we definitely noticed a change in behaviour in people turning out. It is not necessarily in the first week pre-poll opens—it is a bit quieter then—but certainly in the second week it picks up and probably doubles, and it doubles again in the final week, I think when people realise that they have the ability to go in and vote early before the Saturday. It is definitely becoming a lot more popular.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: From that point of view is there a sense that organisations need to gear around an extended pre-poll period and that it will become an ongoing feature of elections?

Mr CALABRESE: We definitely changed some of the usual time frames we use, whether that be things like campaign launches or mail communications, to take into account that some people would be turning up early. But as I said, in the first week it opened—so, three weeks out—it still was a very small number of people going through. So we are not quite there yet where we have to move everything back significantly, but you do have to take into account that people are making their minds up and voting three weeks out, which is quite different to what we are used to when we campaign.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Does that have any implications from your point of view on the way that organisations release policy announcements and the timing of those?

Mr CALABRESE: Yes, definitely. I think traditionally you would wait until the last couple of weeks to make bigger announcements. Making those earlier on means you catch the people who are voting early. I am not sure we are quite at the level yet where all your big policies would be announced that early on. I guess some silver lining to that is the earlier policies are announced, the longer there can be scrutiny applied to them, which is probably a good thing.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Thank you.

[10.00 am]

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: I am interested in your comments about the length of time. If we duplicate what we have done this year and maintain those three weeks, what are your thoughts on the times that they are opening? I know that this nine to five, Monday to Friday, pigeonholes a lot of people who use the pre-poll service. My thoughts were once you start a pre-poll, you start at 10 in the morning and you finish perhaps a bit later, and you go over the weekends. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr CALABRESE: I think replicating the same timeframes as polling day probably is not ideal, and if you are trying to capture people who have difficulty voting nine to five, opening a bit later so that you can operate later into the evening would mean perhaps more people can arrive early to vote. I guess the only concern I raise is around the three-week period being quite long. I just wonder whether it would be beneficial to reduce that to two weeks and then not have to increase your staffing levels to provide longer hours or have quicker queues to make it a bit more appealing. I think three weeks tends to spread. As has been noted, we did have significant lines at a few pre-poll locations. Whether that was a staffing issue or teething or something like that, I am not too sure, but to me reducing that period and probably extending the timings for the evening to capture those people who are unable to vote nine to five would be quite sensible.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: So I could probably summarise this by saying better organisation, and knowing that it is 12 months out would be of benefit in locking in polling booths earlier on and utilising possibly local government facilities rather than retail businesses. Would I be on the right track in suggesting that sort of stuff, with more flexible times, shortening the length of the opening of these pre-polls to two weeks, but working them over weekends and for later hours, to capture the more flexible clientele, for want of a better way of putting it?

Mr CALABRESE: Yes. The purpose of pre-poll to me is for those people who cannot vote nine to five on polling day. So allowing them to vote later in the evening, or whenever it may be, over the weekend, and being a bit more flexible helps them, and that is the purpose of having the pre-poll; and also looking at the use of local government facilities or the like would make the WAEC's job a bit easier in booking those venues.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: You could almost summarise it by saying better management, particularly of the booths themselves, and of the process in general?

Mr CALABRESE: I think those sorts of changes would give the WAEC the ability to better manage or make bookings further out, which would be quite helpful for them.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Do you have a particular preference in terms of the pre-poll? I use Balcatta as an example, and Joondalup. In Balcatta, you did not have any signage; you just had the how-to-vote cards on the inside. In Joondalup, you had the signage, and you had people handing out how-to-vote cards. Do you have a particular preference as to which one of those two would be the preferred model, if there was a model, for consistency—just from that perspective?

Mr CALABRESE: There are a few jurisdictions, maybe Tasmania, which has an arrangement in place where you cannot hand material out at booths. For me, it is consistency. If you have a set of rules for a particular booth, every booth should follow those rules regardless of where they are. Either you have people handing material out at every booth, or you have how-to-vote cards laid out at a table at every booth. I think our ability to supply volunteers when you are sort of at the low of a cycle is a bit more difficult, and it is the same, I think, for every party. In one campaign it might be quite easy to motivate people and get them out to polling booths, and the next day it could be quite difficult. I do not think there is any natural advantage other than maybe having access to organisations with a few more people. It is, for me, consistency.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: When you say “consistency”, are you talking about the rules on polling day being the same as the rules on pre-poll, or can the rules be different? For example, on pre-poll you can say no signage, no how-to-vote cards, it is just inside the room; they grab their own how-to-vote cards and that is all the rules for the pre-poll, and then on polling day you have your bunting and your how-to-vote cards and all that sort of thing. Do you see a problem if there was a different approach to those two different things?

Mr CALABRESE: That, to me, sounds perfectly acceptable. There is a very clear distinction between pre-polling and polling day. It is similar to what happens in hospitals. We know that when the WAEC is collecting votes in a hospital, no signage is allowed, and you are not allowed to do anything other than hand out how-to-vote cards. Those rules are set and applied across every hospital, so that is the consistency. I think what you suggested would be easy enough for us to explain to our volunteers and not upset anyone else by doing things that we should not be doing.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The other thing I found with the pre-polls is that—I will use Balcatta as an example. We did not have people handing out how-to-vote cards, and I would pop in there from time to time just to check that my how-to-vote card was still there. But we noticed when the long lines were there and the electoral commission staff were inside that people with disabilities were

not ushered in more quickly than other people and were left waiting in the line. If I saw them, I told them they could go in, but the door was so small that unless someone was outside and observant and ushered them in, the electoral commission staff were too busy locked inside. That, I think, was an issue as well. It was disappointing for those sorts of people for early voting.

Mr CALABRESE: I would assume that although we expected more people to vote early, perhaps that high number was not expected. But, as I have said, for me, without having to increase the budget, if you reduce the amount of time for early voting, you can keep the same number of staff on and perhaps provide a quicker service at some of the bigger locations like that, which may give you the ability then to look after individuals who may have a disability or the like.

The CHAIRMAN: On campaigning more generally, do you have any insight into the impact of third party groups who are not registered political parties and engage in political campaigning, both generally and particularly at polling booths, be they pre-polls or election day polling booths?

Mr CALABRESE: I think we have seen the number of organisations that are not political parties probably increase over time. It is something that as the Liberal Party we definitely do struggle to deal with. Whether that is political organisations like GetUp or the union movement, whatever it may be, they obviously provide great support to the parties that they are aligned with, which do not often tend to be the Liberal Party. I think that where there is perhaps a need to make some changes, I believe, to the legislation, it would be around the assistance they provide through campaign material like robocalls. As an example, there are a huge number of robocalls placed by the unions, but you are unable to determine who it is exactly that is delivering the message, who is paying for that message, and perhaps who they may be aligned to, and the reasons for providing that message. I think that is just a reflection on the legislation not keeping up with modern technology or modern campaigning. With that example, a robocall is not required to be authorised. So you can place a call from whoever you want, provide whatever message you want to provide, and leave the person on the other end of the phone struggling to understand who that is from or whether it was a political call or a genuine call.

[10.10 am]

The CHAIRMAN: So irrespective of what group engages in that, a level playing field in relation to distribution of election material, be it by phone or other means, should in your mind have an authorisation attached to it in the same way that a television ad or a leaflet would?

Mr CALABRESE: Yes. In terms of printed material, say, these third party organisations definitely produce quite a large volume of material. I am not sure that this is the exact figure but I think I read on the ABC not too long ago that various unions contributed about \$1 million—it may have been around that number—during the state campaign. That is a lot of material that is produced. Printed material is authorised, and I think everyone is aware that it needs to be authorised and everyone seems to do that, which is great, so there is a level playing field there. In terms of robocalls prior to the campaign, we met with the WAEC to clarify whether they were required to be authorised, and we were told it is the WAEC's preference; however, the legislation does not state that you need to authorise them. So I think everyone accepts that the playing field is that no authorisation is required, whereas perhaps amending the legislation to allow the WAEC, or whomever it may be, to ensure that these organisations and parties are authorising robocalls would be a great thing. It certainly applies as well to some online media where there is a bit of inconsistency. An example is Facebook, where each Facebook page is authorised but the material that is published by that page does not necessarily need an authorisation on it. So if you are putting out a political message, the equivalent of a postcard, or whatever it may be, you do not need to authorise that individual message, which you can then pay to promote to people, and they may not be able to tell immediately who has paid

to put that material in there. For me, a great example around early voting is encouraging people to enrol. We found that some parties were promoting material that came across as looking like it may have been from the WAEC, and they were providing a service or paying to promote registering through the WAEC, but the messages that accompanied that were not exactly apolitical. The only way to tell who paid for that advertising or who may have been authorising it was to dig into the ad, which is not something the average person is going to do.

The CHAIRMAN: That is interesting for legislative change, the fact that the legislation has not caught up with modern campaigning techniques. On the actual distribution of physical material, there is a requirement for authorisation. Some states have moved further and require registration of material that is distributed around polling places, either on polling day or at pre-poll. Do you think there is any value in examining that sort of system?

Mr CALABRESE: I think one of the issues we may run into there is that to suggest that not everyone is going to trust the bureaucrats responsible for approving that material or registering that material may not be a fair reflection on the bureaucrats, but often material is produced at the last minute. It may be something that is printed in-house and rushed out to a polling booth. So for any party or organisation to produce last-minute material and take it out would mean it would be quite difficult to have someone register or check that before it does go out. On polling day, as an example, the returning officer has the ability to remove material that is not authorised correctly. I think that is something everyone on polling day looks out for—ensuring that material is appropriately authorised. In most cases the returning officers deal with that adequately, but there are examples, even at the last state election, where material was quite clearly produced by someone at home and handed out, and it took a number of hours for that to be rectified.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Do you think how-to-vote cards should be registered? You are talking about material in general. There are certain things that you know well in advance, generally your how-to-vote card and your preferencing and the deals you have done and all that sort of thing. That is all done, so you could register that, and then other material could be fluid, because obviously on the day the how-to-vote card is the most important thing and there are a few versions of that floating around.

Mr CALABRESE: It is a difficult one. Obviously with the current system, ticket voting means we have the Council preferences essentially recorded for everyone to see, but in terms of your how-to-vote card or your lower house preferencing that is often something people see for the first time on polling day. I am not sure about this state election but definitely at the last state election there were issues around how-to-vote cards that may not necessarily have been produced by the party itself. I am not sure whether registering them is the way to fix that, and it does remove a bit of flexibility if you are to make last-minute changes. My preference is that we move as far away as possible from having registered tickets or cards like that.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Sam, as you said, third parties put in about \$1 million for the campaign. Do you anticipate or do you have an opinion or view on campaign expenditure caps? The National Party was concerned that they would like to see campaign expenditure caps implemented. Does your party have a view on that?

Mr CALABRESE: I do not think we have a formal view on it. That figure I read was from the ABC, so I am not entirely sure how correct it is, but I believe it was around that, and definitely what we saw suggested to the value of somewhere around that. Similar to volunteers, every party experiences difficulty in raising funds, and obviously that means the ability to spend it. This time around I think it was quite clear that we were at a bit of a disadvantage in terms of fundraising compared to our opponents. I do not know whether putting a cap in place for political parties has been explored for

third party organisations who are not registered political parties but tend to engage in the same activities as a political party, but that might be a different story.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Sorry to interrupt but I just want to go back to this cost-fixing. It concerns me. What are your thoughts on it? Are you saying that we should go down the road of fixing the cost per campaigns and stopping third parties from campaigning as well?

Mr CALABRESE: No, not at all. I am not sure I suggested or agreed with fixing costs. Third parties is quite a topical issue and has been for the past few campaigns, and how they engage. We see organisations like GetUp, as an example, which tend to behave or at least engage in the same sort of distribution of messaging and materials as a political party but are not a registered political party. That is something worth exploring, but I am not sure —

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: So you are saying you are worried about the influence of interest groups campaigning on a particular issue and influencing the electorate?

Mr CALABRESE: I am not sure it is engaged on particular issues, because I think everyone has a right to express —

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: You are referring to GetUp and that sort of stuff. During the last election, on the campaign in relation to privatisation of the electricity system, we saw it with interest groups who are not political parties as such. We saw it with the CME and the Nationals. They are interest groups who are not political parties. Are you saying you do not want them involved with the electoral process?

[10.20 am]

Mr CALABRESE: No. I think you can even look further back to, say, the federal campaign where you had the Master Builders' Association engaged in a campaign on a particular issue. Where it starts to get a bit grey is when you have organisations who perhaps are not focused on a sole issue but more pushing an agenda. I am not sure that that is for me to comment on too much more, but I think there is a difference between an organisation like the Master Builders' Association that is expressing a view on a particular issue, or the CME as an example as well, to an organisation that seems to take a bit more of a philosophical view on who they tend to support and their support tends to be solely for a particular party or groups of parties. There is a bit of a difference. When you look at the CME as an example, I do not think you could suggest that the CME is aligned to a particular party. They were obviously pushing —

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: I think the Nationals would disagree with that!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is certainly an important democratic principle about the right to participate on a single issue or multiple issues and should there be any constraints on that. I think I am hearing clearly from you a view that there should not be. It is about authorisation and identification of who is expressing that view rather than any constraints on the ability to express the view.

Mr CALABRESE: Yes, exactly. That is spot on. I do not think it is for us to suggest people should not be able to express their views, no matter what they may be, but correct authorisation and having an understanding of where they may be providing assistance and support and to whom so that a person can make up their own mind as to whether they are providing a political message or communicating their view on it.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It goes to the heart of transparency.

Mr CALABRESE: That is right.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: With regard to, I suppose, third parties: firstly, political parties, what about the accuracy of the message you are selling? There are messages where you see them pushing certain

issues, and for those who are enlightened, they will say that is just a blatant lie, but they continue to push that lie and promote that lie. Therefore, the question one must ask oneself is: is the community being treated fairly by being fed lies and to then vote on those lies? It is like fake news. There should be some restrictions on political advertising, wherever it is coming from, where it can be identified as a blatant lie.

Mr CALABRESE: I think that is an issue at both the state and federal election. I can give recent examples of where perhaps lies have been held as the truth, and I am sure other examples could be provided by members of the community. It is a difficult one. I think at the end of the day it is up to politicians to ensure that when they are providing a message or talking to the public, they are doing so truthfully. It would be quite difficult to have an organisation like the WAEC become the truth police. The media need to play their role in that as well, and quite often they do. At the end of the day it is up to politicians and parties to make sure that they are campaigning honestly.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I know, but what about third parties?

Mr CALABRESE: Third parties is a difficult one. Do you provide the WAEC or whomever it may be—the electoral commission—the power to determine what is true and what is not, and then how would you follow through that process? It is incredibly difficult.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Fake news is here to stay.

Mr CALABRESE: There are third party organisations and the media obviously try to play their role and provide their thoughts. You may have read recently that services like Facebook are trying to work out ways where they can address fake news or discredit fake news, whatever it may be. I think everyone has to play their part. You just have to hope people decide to do the right thing and tell the truth.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: The National Party has again expressed concern to this committee and publicly about issues surrounding the district of Pilbara with respect to enrolment figures specifically, and we have already covered enough on what they cite as the third party activity of the CME. Does the Liberal Party have any concerns with respect to the so-called jump in enrolment figures and any other concerns relating to the campaign in the district of Pilbara?

Mr CALABRESE: I am not sure that the Liberal Party has a particular view on that. I think I read in the media that other parties have raised some concerns. It is not something we have pursued or looked into any further.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: So there is nothing unusual from your perspective about what happened in the Pilbara?

Mr CALABRESE: As far as I am aware, there have been suggestions that there have been issues, but I not sure that there have been findings of any wrongdoing.

The CHAIRMAN: On direct enrolment generally does your party have a particular view on how that operates, whether you are comfortable with its operation, and whether there are any challenges or concerns with direct enrolment—more generally, not in any particular district?

Mr CALABRESE: One of the changes we had to adjust to was the mirroring of the electoral roll. That was quite a recent change prior to the state election so that the commonwealth roll and the state roll were in sync. There are pros and cons to that arrangement. Other than the teething issues in getting updated electoral rolls for the state, I am not sure there were any other issues that we encountered.

The CHAIRMAN: On postal voting, there has been some evidence that the changes in Australia Post provide real challenges in relation to postal voting, and the fact that the mail service has reduced in frequency. Did that cause you any concerns during the election campaign?

Mr CALABRESE: We experienced a few issues, other than the constant price hikes that Australia Post tends to pass on. I believe in our early discussions with the WAEC they decided not to send mail to electors to inform them of the election, purely because of the enormous cost of doing so, and they thought it was better to allocate money to promoting that in other ways, which we can completely understand. But it does mean that people who may not be on social media or involved in the media more generally may not have been aware of the timeframes of the election. As I said, we can understand that purely because of the cost, that was very difficult for them to do. We still sent out the same number of postal vote applications as we always do. The return rate I think probably was a little lower than usual. I would assume the reason for that is more people were probably going to early voting, and they made their mind up that they have an extended period to go and do that, so rather than having to worry about posting something it was easier to rock up to a venue. The delay for us in postage time was not so much an issue of our letters and applications that we send to assist in increasing the number of postal votes for the WAEC, and it was not so much the issue of the timing of when that arrived in people's mailboxes, but definitely the return of that mail. The way that worked meant that once someone had received and sent the reply, it could be a number of days to a week before that would be lodged. So we had a number of people—probably more than we had before—call to check and make sure that that process had been followed through. Our number one concern was definitely price. It is incredibly expensive to communicate with people through direct mail. The timing did provide some challenges, but it was more perhaps the uncertainty of the people who had filled out those forms and ensuring that they had been processed in a timely manner.

[10.30 am]

The CHAIRMAN: The WAEC has expressed some concerns about political parties having an involvement in the postal voting process insofar as sending and processing applications at the first instance. Do you have any comments about that?

Mr CALABRESE: Our goal is to provide postal vote applications to every constituent we can. As I said, it is not something the WAEC does any more. We are probably the only party to be doing so now. What we do is clearly mark on our material that they will receive a letter informing them about the election, which again I believe they no longer receive from the WAEC, so we provide them with some general information from us, as well as an authorised postal vote application form that the WAEC sees beforehand and approves—they let us know there is no issue with that. We keep it quite clearly marked that it is provided by us as a courtesy, and we do not brand the postal vote application form, so it is not a political piece as such. As I said, the WAEC still approves it prior to it being posted. We supply a reply-paid envelope as well to ensure that whoever wants to take up that option because they cannot vote on polling day or cannot get to a pre-poll centre can do so without having to pay the \$1 or whatever it may be to send it back. We try to make it as easy as possible to encourage more people to vote via postal vote if they cannot vote on polling day for whatever reason.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Thank you for that. Going back to the electoral roll, one question. We know that we have a state roll and we have a federal roll. What are your thoughts on having one roll?

Mr CALABRESE: It almost is at the moment.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Clearly it was not, based on what we saw with the issues coming out of the north, whereas if we had one electoral roll surely it would be the way to stop any discrepancies in the future.

Mr CALABRESE: I think perhaps the reason for that may be the lag time in the update or the synchronisation of them. As I said earlier in the piece, we experienced some issues with that lag time, and for us where that was most frustrating was in trying to communicate with people to inform them of significant boundary changes. I could not talk to or against the merits of having a single roll. I understand we have people who are enrolled as federal-only voters and people who are enrolled as state-only voters. I am not entirely sure why that is the case, but it is not something we have put too much thought into.

The CHAIRMAN: We are going to have to wind up, but one final question from me is that after the 2013 Senate voting circumstances in the commonwealth new measures were put in place for ballot paper security. From your perspective were there any issues around ballot paper security during this election?

Mr CALABRESE: It was quite interesting to make some comparisons between the last federal campaign and the state campaign. As I said earlier, the WAEC definitely learnt a lot of lessons. Personally, I was quite happy with the process. There are a lot of the measures that they have put in place to ensure that they did not experience the same issues as the AEC did. I am not entirely sure what else they could do to protect ballot papers. We did not see the usual issues of boxes of ballots not having the appropriate seals or the appropriate labels on them. The minor issues—ignore the major issues that we have previously experienced, a lot of the minor issues they seem to have rectified for the state campaign. There were no significant worries reported to us by our volunteers on the ground.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Was there any concern from your point of view about the inclusion of how-to-vote material in the distribution of those postal vote applications?

Mr CALABRESE: For us, speaking purely from the Liberal Party's point of view, when we send the postal vote material out, we try to send that out about a month out to give people plenty of time to fill in the form. We do not provide how-to-vote material that early—for us, it just does not meet our timeframe. We do provide a letter that talks about the election and our local candidates, but in that letter we do not solicit a vote in terms of providing a how-to-vote card.

The CHAIRMAN: Like you, we are key stakeholders in this, so we have a phenomenal interest in this and we could go on for a long time, but our time is restricted today.

Thank you for your evidence before the committee. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 working days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. If you have any other supplementary material, it would be most welcome. Thank you for your time today.

Hearing concluded at 10.36 am
